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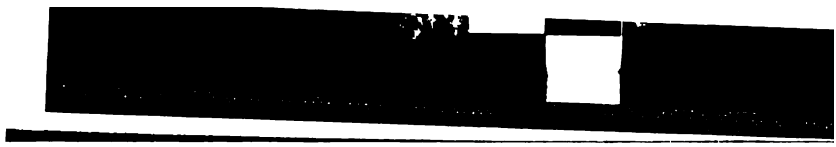

TRGNX

E. K. MEANS

Is this a title? It is not. It is the name of a writer of negro stories, who has made himself so remarkable the writer of negro stories that his work needs no title.

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ROMAIN

[illegible]

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

"Boo-hoo," Scootie wailed.
"Aw! shut up," the old man snapped.

(*See page 12.*)

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Is this a title? It is not. It is the name of a writer of negro stories, who has made himself so completely the writer of negro stories that his book needs no title.

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NEW YORK AND LONDON
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R. K. MEANS

The Knickerbocker Press, New York

To

ROBERT H. DAVIS

WHO TAUGHT ME HOW

AND

"ITTU"

WHO KEPT ME AT IT.

have always called him Butts. Vinegar Atts is a well-known colored preacher of north Louisiana, whose "swing-tail prancin'-albert coat" has been seen in many pulpits, and whose "stove-pipe, preachin' hat" has been the target of many a stone thrown from a mischievous white boy's hand. Hitch Diamond is known at every landing place on the Mississippi River as "Big Sandy."

When these tales were first published in the *All Story Weekly*, many readers declared that they were humorous. Nevertheless, I hold that a story containing dialect must necessarily have many depressing and melancholy features. But dialect does not consist of perverted pronunciations and phonetic orthography. True dialect is a picture in cold type of the manifold peculiarities of the mind and temperament. In its form, I have attempted to give merely a *flavor* of the negro dialect; but I have made a sincere attempt to preserve the essence of dialect by making these stories contain a true idea of the negro's shrewd observations, curious retorts, quaint comments, humorous philosophy, and his unique point of view on everything that comes to his attention.

The Folk Tales of Joel Chandler Harris are imperishable pictures of plantation life in the South before the Civil War and of the negro slave who echoed all his master's prejudice of caste and pride of family in the old times that are no more.

The negroes of this volume are the sons of the old slaves. Millions of them live to-day in the small Southern villages, and as these stories indi-

cate, many changes of character, mind, and temperament have taken place in the last half-century through the modifications of freedom and education.

This type also is passing. In a brief time, the negro who lives in these pages will be a memory, like Uncle Remus. "Ethiopia is stretching out her hands" after art, science, literature, and wealth, and when the sable sons of laughter and song grasp these treasures, all that remains of the Southern village negro of to-day will be a few faint sketches in Fiction's beautiful temple of dreams.

E. K. MEANS.

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The Late Figger Bush.

FIGGER BUSH did not look like a man who was about to die; if anything, he looked like one who ought to be killed.

He was a scarecrow sort of a negro, with ragged, flapping clothes. His coal-black face formed a background for a little, stubby, shoe-brush mustache, and Figger thought that mustache justified his existence in the world. He had not much use for his coconut head except to support a battered wool hat and grow a luxuriant crop of kinky hair. He had an insuperable aversion to all sorts of work.

None of these things indicated that Figger was about to die; in fact, they showed that he was enjoying life.

The only thing that indicated an unusual condition in Figger was the fact that he was now walking down the middle of the road with rapid and ever-lengthening steps, glancing from side to side, and grumbling aloud to himself.

"I gotta find dat Skeeter Butts an' find him quick," he muttered. "Nothin' like dis ain't never happen to me befo', an' nobody cain't 'lucidate on my troubles like Skeeter kin."

A high, cackling laugh, accompanied by a hoarse bellow of laughter, floated to him upon the hot August breeze, and Figger ceased his grumbling and began to chuckle.

"I gits exputt advices now," he mumbled. "Skeeter am talkin' sociable wid de Revun Vinegar Atts."

On top of the hill in front of the Shoofly church, Figger found his two friends resting under the shade of a chinaberry tree.

Skeeter Butts, the little, yellow barkeeper at the Hen-Scratch saloon, had the back of his chair propped against the trunk of the tree, his heels hung in the rungs of the chair in front, and looked like a jockey mounted upon a bony, sway-backed horse. Vinegar Atts, the fat, bald-headed, moon-faced pastor of the Shoofly church, sat on one chair, rested his feet on another, and had his massive arms outspread upon the backs of yet two other chairs. He looked like a pot-bellied buzzard trying to fly upside down and backward.

"Come up, Figger!" Vinegar howled, as he kicked the chair, on which his feet rested, toward him. "Take a seat, take a set-down, rest yo' hat, spit on de flo'—make yo'se'f at home!"

Figger picked up the chair, placed it back where Atts could rest his feet upon it again, and sat down upon the ground, interlocking the fingers of both hands and nursing his bent knees.

"You been cuttin' out chu'ch recent. How come?" Vinegar bellowed.

"Religium don't he'p a po' nigger like me," Figger responded gloomily.

"Dat's a fack," Atts agreed promptly. "Religium is got to hab somepin to ketch holt on an' you ain't nothin'."

"Whut ails you?" Skeeter inquired, looking at Figger intently. "You ain't look nachel to me some way."

Figger sighed deeply, then executed a feeble grin.

"A nigger man is comin' to see me, Skeeter," he explained, "an' I don't need him."

"Who's a-comin'?"

"Popsy Spout."

"Whar's he been at?" Vinegar asked.

"Yallerbam'," Figger told him.

There was a moment of silence while the two waited for Figger to tell them all about it. But if Figger ever did anything he had to be pushed along.

"I don't see nothin' so powerful bad in dat," Skeeter snapped, impatient at the delay. "Popsy Spout is comin' from Yalabama—well?"

"It's dis way," Figger explained, slapping at the ground with his battered wool hat to give emphasis to his speech. "Popsy Spout is my gran'pap on my mammy's side. My mammy died soon an' Popsy raised me up. He always toted a big hick'ry cane an' he raised me pretty frequent. One day he promise me a whalin' an' I snooped ten dollars outen his money-bag an' skunt out fer Tickfall. Dat was twenty year ago."

"You reckin' Popsy is comin' to colleck up?" Skeeter snickered.

"Naw, suh. I figger dat Popsy is gittin' ole an' lonesome an' tuck up a notion to come an' pay me a little visit."

"How long will he stay on?" Skeeter asked.

"I kinder think he thinks he'll stay on till he dies," Figger announced in tragic tones, as he produced a soiled letter and held it out to Skeeter. "Read dis, an' see kin you find any yuther hopes in whut he do say."

Skeeter took the letter out of the envelope and read it aloud, giving the peculiar African pronunciation to the words as he spoke them:

"DEAR FIGGER:

Dis letter will kotch you jes' befo' I gits offen de train at Tickfall. I wus raised an' bawn in de Little Mocassin Swamp, an' I wants to come home an' live wid you till I die. I needs somebody of my kinnery aroun' so I won't git so lonesome. Good-by. I'm comin' powerful soon.

POPSY SPOUT."

Skeeter handed the letter back with a look of deep sympathy and pity.

"Bad luck, Figger," Vinegar Atts bellowed. "You cain't mo' dan half suppote yo' se'f, an' now you done got a ready-made gran'pap to suppote. A nigger kin git mighty ole an' deef, but he always hears de dinner-horn."

"Dat's right," Figger wailed. "Whut muss I do?"

"Don't start squealin' like a pig kotch in a gap," Skeeter snapped, as he passed around a box of cigarettes. "Smoke one of dese an' ease down yo' mind a little."

"Whut muss I do?" Figger wailed again.

"Vinegar, you ax 'terrogations while I medjertates," Skeeter proposed, as he leaned his chair back against the tree.

"When did you perceive dis here Popsy las', Figger?" Vinegar inquired.

"More'n twenty year ago."

"Whut do he look like?"

"He looks like a black nigger. I s'pose he's bleached out some in de las' twenty year."

"Is you ever heard any word from him befo'?"

"Naw, suh. Word ain't been sont."

"How do Popsy know you is still livin'?" Vinegar inquired.

"Huh!" Skeeter Butts grunted, as he suddenly sat up and slapped his hand upon his knee. "Dat's de very idear I needs!"

"Whut?" Vinegar asked.

"Figger Bush will be dead when Popsy comes," Skeeter snickered. "Dead an' buried!"

"Not ef I kin he'p it!" Figger announced, as he rose to his feet with a frightened air. "You got to ketch a nigger fust befo' you kin dead an' bury him."

"Set down, Figger!" Skeeter exclaimed. "Yo' gran'pap on yo' mammy's side didn't inherit you no brains! Dis here is a good plan to git you out of trouble."

"Tell it to me slow," Figger begged, as he resumed his seat on the ground. "I don't favor no plan havin' a dead Figger Bush in it."

"Listen, Figger!" Skeeter urged. "I wants you to pick out a nice-lookin' nigger gal whut could play like she wus yo' widder."

"Suttinly," Figger grinned, beginning to see the light. "Scootie Tandy could play widder. She's been one about two year—all de nigger mens run after her tryin' to pussuade her to fergit her spite an' marry agin. I could git her to play widder."

"Dat'll put an eend to yo' mis'ry," Skeeter cackled. "Go tell Scootie all yo' trouble, ax Scootie to meet de train dat Popsy comes on, an' bust de sad news to him dat you is dead an' buried!"

"Mebbe Popsy won't b'lieve her," Figger objected.

"Me an' Vinegar will back her up in dat tale," Skeeter assured him. "De revun elder won't mind stretchin' de blanket a little fer de sake of savin' a friend. Ain't dat so, Revun?"

"Dat's so!" Vinegar declared. "My life job an' my callin' is savin' niggers!"

"Whar muss I git to while I'm bein' dead?" Figger inquired.

"Go fishin'," Skeeter grinned. "Fishin' is de best spote on yearth fer de livin' an' de dead!"

"How long am I got to stay dead?" Figger asked.

"When de ole man Popsy hears tell dat you is gone hence an' ain't no mo,' he'll take his foot in

his hand an' ramble back to Yalabam'," Vinegar rumbled. "Dat'll be yo' sing to come fo'th from de dead!"

Figger put on his battered hat and stood up. He asked pleadingly:

"Couldn't you loant a dead man half a dollar, Skeeter?"

"Whut you want wid it?" Skeeter snapped.

"I figger dat a real live corp' oughter git a haircut an' a shave!" Figger chuckled.

"Dat's right," Skeeter laughed, as he handed out the money. "You scoot over an' see Scootie right now!"

Scootie Tandy was a fat, good-natured young woman, who wore red head-rags, wrapped up her kinky hair with strings to give it a better kink, and had no higher object in life than to be regular at her meals.

She had worn deep mourning for over a year for a worthless husband whose death had been advantageous to her in that it gave her an excuse for doing even less work than she had done when he was living.

"It 'pears like I ain't been well an' strong sence Jim died an' lef' me to 'tend to eve'ything," she whined at the kitchen doors of the white people, to aid her plea for food and old clothes.

Figger believed he was in love with Scootie, and Scootie made eyes at him, but Skeeter said they were not thinking about marrying. He declared they were merely watching each other to see which

could live longest without work and without landing in jail for vagrancy.

"Scootie," Figger began, "you don't mind playin' a widder, does you?"

"Naw," Scootie told him. "Men is a heap mo' int'rusted in deir minds 'bout widders dan dey is 'bout gals, pervidin' ef de widders ain't got no nigger chillun crawlin' on de cabin flo'."

"Would you mind bein' my widder?" Figger inquired hesitatingly.

"I'd like it," Scootie laughed. "Is you aimin' to die real soon?"

"I passes off powerful soon," Figger grinned.

Then Figger told her of his troubles, and explained what he wanted her to do.

"My ole gran'pap won't hab no easy job attachin' hisse'f onto me," Figger announced in conclusion. "Dis here corp' is gwine keep movin' his remainders somewhar else."

"Whut train is Popsy comin' on?" Scootie asked.

"He'll be here on de dinner-time train, I think," Figger replied. "You go down an' meet dat train, an' ef he comes you pass him back onto de caboose an' tell him to keep trabbelin'."

"When muss I tell him you died?" Scootie asked.

"Gwine on a year!" Figger suggested.

"Whut did you die of?"

"Two buckles on de lungs," Figger told her.

"Wus you sick very long?" Scootie asked.

"Yes'm. Tell him I wus feelin' feeble an' not

able to wuck none fer about fo'teen year, which is how come I ain't leave no property," Figger declared.

"Ain't you got no picture of yo'se'f fer me to set on de mantelpiece an' cry at?" Scootie asked.

"Suttinly," Figger said, as he slipped his hand into his coat-pocket and brought out a cheap photograph. "Dis am de best koodak I'm ever had took—it shows off my mustache so good! Don't dem lip-whiskers look nachel?"

"Dey shore do sot off yo' face," Scootie replied, as she studied the photograph and considered all the information Figger had given her. Finally Scootie asked:

"S'pose Popsy don't b'lieve all dese tales?"

"'Tain't no danger," Figger answered. "I'll make myse'f absent, an' Skeeter an' Vinegar will back you up."

"All right, Figger," Scootie grinned. "I'll gib you a lift-out. I don't mind succulatin' de repote dat you is dead; some folks will be dum glad to hear it!"

"Bein' dead ain't such awful bad luck," Figger laughed. "I done promise de white folks to do about fawty jobs of wuck, an' dem whites keeps me a dodgin' like a bumpin'-bug. Furdermo', I owes a heap money in dis here town whut I don't never expeck to pay back, an' my tongue gits dry tellin' how soon I hopes to wuck an' make some cash money. Bless Gawd, dead niggers like me cain't wuck an' cain't pay—dey got to charge all my debts to de dust an' let de rain settle 'em!"

"My stomick tells me dat de dinner-time train is mighty nigh here, Figger," Scootie said. "You better git away an' let me dress up accawdin' to dis here sad succumstance."

"Dis is whar I disappears complete, Scootie," Figger grinned, as he stepped off the porch. "I hope you won't slight yo' mournin' fer me atter I'm gone."

Then Scootie prepared herself to meet the train—a black dress, black gloves, a long black veil over a purple and yellow hat with a poll-parrot on it, a palm-leaf fan, the edge appropriately encircled with black braid, and a white handkerchief with a broad border. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled with satisfaction.

"I's gwine wear mournin' all my life," she announced to herself. "It makes my complexion mo' fair."

When the train pulled into the station, Scootie was standing near the negro coach, looking for a man who resembled Figger's description of Popsy Spout as he remembered his grandfather after twenty years. Only one negro passenger got off, and Scootie merely glanced at him and waited for some one else.

When the train pulled out, Scootie turned, and the negro passenger was standing close beside her on the platform.

"Is you lookin' fer somebody?" Scootie asked. "I knows eve'ybody in dis town."

Then Scootie got a surprise.

"Yes'm," the man answered, in a weak, tired voice. "I wus expeckin' Figger Bush."

Scootie reeled back and glared at the speaker with popping eyeballs.

He stood before her, over six feet tall and as straight as an Indian. His face was as black as new tar and was seamed by a thousand tiny wrinkles, written all over with the literature of life and experience. His long hair was as white as milk, and his two wrinkled and withered hands rested upon a patriarchal staff nearly as tall as himself.

On his head was a stove-pipe hat, bell-shaped, the nap long since thrown off like an outworn garment, and the top of the hat was as red as a brick from exposure to the weather. An old, faded, threadbare and patched Prince Albert coat swathed his emaciated form like a bath-robe.

Instantly Scootie knew that this man belonged to that vanishing race of negroes who were the glory and the pride of the South in the ante-bellum days. They cling like vines around the old homesteads, cared for and protected by men who were once their white masters, and when they die, more white people attend their funerals than members of their own race.

Only one thing denoted that age had left a blight upon the dignified form of Popsy Spout, and that mark was in his eyes: the vacant, age-dimmed stare of second childhood, indicating that reason no longer sat regnant upon the crystal throne of the intellect, looking out of the windows of the soul.

"I's powerful glad to meet a young gal like you, honey," he said in the high falsetto of old age. "Figger is missed meetin' me some way. He always wus a mos' onreliable piccaninny. I's had a long trip. My name is Popsy Spout."

This was Scootie's cue to turn on the water-works. She brought out her black-bordered handkerchief and began to weep.

"I wus lookin' fer you, Popsy," she sobbed. "Poor Figger Bush is dead an' I's his widder!"

"How's dat—which?" the old man quavered.

"Dead! Plum' dead—dead an' buried!" Scootie wailed.

"Did he die layin' down?" the old man asked.

"Yes, suh. He died nachel."

"Huh!" the old man snorted. "Dat suttinly is strange. I never predick no sech come-out fer Figger—how come de white folks didn't shoot him or hang him? He shore deeserved it!"

"Boo-hoo!" Scootie wailed.

"Aw, shut up!" the old man snapped, in high, shrill tones. "Figger didn't never amount to nothin' nohow. I know it's all fer de best, an' ef you had de sense Gawd gibs to a crazy geese, you'd be dum glad he's a deader!"

"Mebbe so, suh," Scootie mourned, "but I shore miss him a-plenty."

"Of co'se!" Popsy exploded. "You miss de stomick-ache, too, but 'tain't resomble to howl because you ain't got it. It's proper to miss pestications but 'tain't good sense to mourn deir loss. How long is Figger been dead?"

"'Bout a year," Scootie sobbed.

"By jacks!" Popsy snorted. "Been dead a year an' here you is all blacked up in mournin' like a bucket of tar. Shut up! Whut you so crazy 'bout a dead nigger fer?"

Thus importuned, Scootie saw that she was wasting her tears on Figger as far as Popsy was concerned.

"Whar is you gwine now?" Scootie inquired in a voice which showed that she had found comfort.

"I's aimin' to ooze along over to yo' house an' git my dinner," Popsy told her. "Which way does we start?"

"Figger would shore be mighty sorry to miss yo' visit ef he wus alive an' knowed about it," Scootie remarked as she led the way to her cabin.

"'Tain't so!" Popsy snapped, as he strode along beside her, resting one hand upon her fat shoulder and the other on his staff. "Dat nigger ain't never missed nothin' but a good whalin'—I promised him a lickin' twenty year ago an' he runned away. He ain't never come back."

This speech had a sing-song swing to it, as if it was a complaint which he had repeated for many years whenever Figger's name was mentioned.

"He ain't never come back to git his wallupin'," the old man repeated.

Scootie snickered.

"Dat sounds right!" Popsy applauded, patting the fat shoulder which supported one of his withered hands. "'Tain't no use to shed tears over

Figger. Livin' or dead, he don't deeserve nothin' but a big bust-out laugh."

"I's glad you feels dat way about it, Popsy," Scootie chuckled. "You shore has cheered me up some an' eased my mind a-plenty."

"You got any fryin'-size chickin at yo' cabin?" Popsy asked.

"Yep. I kin cook 'em so you'll wanter die wid a chicken bone in yo' hand, too," Scootie told him. "An' as fur my hot biskits—you'll want one of my hot biskits carved on yo' tombstone!"

"Kin you affode to keep ice-water?"

"Yep. A driver on de ice-wagon is courtin' me servigerous an' he slips me a free chunk eve'y day."

"Dat's good sense," Popsy told her. "Is you got any objections to my chawin' all de eatin' terbacker I wants to?"

"Naw, suh," Scootie giggled. "Figger chawed."

"Does you maintain a jug?" Popsy wanted to know.

"I does; an' it's passable full, too."

"I bet it splashed pretty low when Figger wus livin'," Popsy bleated. "When I wus fotchin' up dat piccaninny he jes' nachelly graduated to'des a jug like all de buzzards in de settlemint comin' to a mule's fun'ral!"

"Dar's my cabin—over yon." Scootie pointed.

The walk had wearied the old man, and it required all of Scootie's strength to lift him up the steps to a rocking-chair upon the porch. She

brought him out a turkey-wing fan, a twist of chewing-tobacco, and a pipe which had belonged to her deceased husband. Then she thought of Figger's photograph, and she handed that to him.

But the aged man's mind had suddenly gone blank because of his physical weakness, exhausted by his long walk.

"Whut you gimme dis here little card fer, Scootie?" he asked perplexedly.

"Dat's a picture of Figger, Popsy!" Scootie exclaimed, turning it so he could see the face.

"Figger who?" Popsy inquired.

"Figger Bush, Popsy," Scootie told him in a patient tone. "Yo' little Figger—my dead husbunt—don't you remember Figger!"

"Is dat so?" the old man asked in uncertain tones. He held the card up and looked at the photograph for a long time.

"Whut you think about him, Popsy?" Scootie asked.

"Dat dead nigger's face an' head shore growed strong on hair an' whiskers," Popsy quavered, as he laid the photograph in the crown of his upturned stove-pipe hat, "like a damp marsh—don't grow nothin' but rank grass!"

"Dat was de way Figger wus," Scootie laughed. "His head wus shore kinder soft an' oozy."

"When is we gwine git our dinner, Scootie?" the old man demanded.

"Right now!" Scootie told him.

"All right!" Popsy said, as he leaned back in his chair. "You call me when she's ready. Feed

me chicken an' hot biskits an' ice-water—lemme taper off wid a dram an' a leetle nap—den I want you to lead me to de bank whar Marse Tommy Gaitskill stays at. Lawd! Lawd! I ain't sot my eyes on little Tommy fer fifty year!"

At two o'clock that afternoon Scootie conducted Popsy Spout through the door of the Tickfall National Bank, down a corridor in the rear of the big vault, and knocked upon a door which bore in dainty gold lettering the word: "President."

In response to a voice within she opened the door and pushed Popsy Spout forward.

Colonel Tom Gaitskill sat beside a table in a swivel chair, a tall, handsome man with the air of a soldier, ruddy-faced, white-haired, genial, and smiling. Gaitskill's fine eyes took him in with a photographic glance.

The old negro stood before him, immaculately neat, though his garments were ragged and time-worn. Dignity sat upon his aged form like virtue upon a venerable Roman senator. Indeed, there flashed through the banker's mind the thought that men like this one who stood before him might have sat in the Carthaginian council of war and planned the campaign which led young Hannibal to the declivities of the Alps where his horde of Africans hung like a storm-cloud while Imperial Rome trembled with fear behind the protection of her walls.

Then fifty years rolled backward like a scroll.

Gaitskill saw a blood-strewn battlefield torn with

shot and shell; he saw clouds of smoke, black, acrid, strangling to the throat, rolling over that field as fogs blow in from the sea; he saw a tall, young, black man emerge from such a pall of smoke carrying a sixteen-year-old boy dressed in the bloody uniform of a Confederate soldier. The young soldier's arms and legs dangled against the negro's giant form as he walked, stepping over the slippery, shot-plowed ground. He saw the negro stagger with his burden to an old sycamore tree and lay the inanimate form upon the ground at its roots, composing the limbs of the boy with beautiful tenderness; then he saw the negro straighten up and gather into his giant paws a broken branch of a tree which two men could hardly have handled.

Waving this limb at the creeping pall of smoke, he screamed like a jungle beast, and whooped: "You dam' Yanks, keep away from dis little white boy—you done him a-plenty—he's dead!"

Gaitskill stood up and stepped forward. He held out a strong white hand, clasping the palsied brown paw of Popsy Spout. No white man ever received a warmer greeting, a more cordial welcome than this feeble black man, aged, worn, tottering through the mazy dreamland of second childhood.

Unnoticed, Scootie Tandy walked to a window and seated herself.

The two old men sat down beside the table and Scootie listened for two hours to reminiscences which went back over half a century. Frequently Popsy Spout's mind wandered, and Gaitskill gave

him a gentle stimulant of liquor, as thoughtful of the darky's waning strength as a courtier would be of the comfort of a king.

"How old are you now, Popsy?" Gaitskill smiled, after they had talked of old times.

"I's sebenty year old—gwine on a hundred."

"Do you really expect to live that long?" Gaitskill asked.

"Yes, suh, ef de white folks takes good keer of me," Popsy answered.

He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a bulky package, tied up with many pieces of many-colored string.

"Dat's my money, Marse Tommy. Please unwrop it an' count it out loud fer me."

Gaitskill poured the currency and coins upon the table and with a money-handler's expert ease, he counted it aloud, announcing the total in about a minute:

"One thousand dollars!"

Scootie Tandy gasped like a woman who had been under water for about five minutes and had just come up, but neither of the men noticed her.

Popsy Spout hesitated a minute, scratched his snow-white hair, and looked at the neat piles of money with an air of perplexity.

"Isn't that correct?" Gaitskill asked.

"Yes, suh, dat's c'reck," Popsy said uncertainly. "Dat's de same number I got when I counted it, but somepin is powerful strange 'bout dat money."

"What's the trouble?" Gaitskill asked.

"You counted it so quick, Marse Tommy!"

"Well—I counted it right, didn't I?"

"Yes, suh, but—I reckin' it's all right, Marse Tommy. But, you see, it tuck me five whole days to count dat money an' it wus de hardest wuck I ever done—I sweated barrels of sweat! It 'peared like a whole big pile, when I counted it. But ef I spends it as quick as you counted it, 'twon't las' me till I kin walk outen dis here bank!"

"I understand," Gaitskill smiled. "But you don't want to spend this money. How long did it take you to accumulate it?"

"Fawty year," Popsy told him. "Bad times comes frequent to a nigger, an' I wanted to save a leetle ahead."

"The idea is to take as long spending it as you did accumulating it," Gaitskill said. "In that case, it will last you until you have passed one hundred."

"Yes, suh, dat's de properest way to do," Popsy agreed. "Dat's why I fotch dis money to you. Kin you keep it fer me?"

"Certainly. That's what this bank is for."

"Marse Jimmy Gaitskill over in Burningham—his bank paid me int'rust prannum on dat money," Popsy said.

"I'll pay you interest per annum, too," Gaitskill smiled, well knowing that his brother had supported Popsy Spout for half a century. "How much money will you need to live on each year?"

"I kin git along on 'bout ten dollars a month, Marse Tommy—wid de clothes an' vittles dat de

white folks gimme. I kin save a little out of dat to 'posit back in de bank fer rainy days."

"That's one hundred and twenty dollars a year with clothes and food," Gaitskill laughed. "Some of the bank's patrons would like to get that much interest per annum."

"Yes, suh. Marse Jimmy Gaitskill specified dat my nigger money drawed powerful int'rust outen his bank."

"You can come here and draw ten dollars every month," Gaitskill said, and he picked up a card and wrote a few words upon it.

"Dat'll fix me fine, Marse Tommy. I kin live scrumpshus on dat."

"Where are you going to live?"

"I ain't got nowhar yit," Popsy said.

"Would you like to live in the log cabin where you lived fifty-five years ago?" Gaitskill inquired.

"Whar I married at? Whar me an' Ca'lline live happy till all us boys went off to de war? Whar you an' me an' Marse Jimmy an' little Hinry useter roast goobers in de hot ash?" Popsy asked eagerly.

"The very same," Gaitskill answered softly. "With the big pecan tree still standing before it, and the big stone door-step where we boys cracked the nuts."

Popsy Spout rose to his feet and bowed like some aged patriarch standing in the presence of a king. His high, quavering voice sobbed like the wailing of a child:

"Marse Tommy, de Gaitskill fambly is de top

of de heap fer kindness an' goodness to dis pore ole nigger!"

He sank back into his chair, wiping the tears from his eyes.

"I guess so," Gaitskill said, and his voice was so soft that each word was like a caress. "We all remember Henry."

"Dat's so, suh," Popsy said, suddenly straightening his bent and quivering shoulders. "Marse Jimmy is told me frequent 'bout you an' him gwine up dar an' findin' Hinry under dat sycamo' tree whar I buried him at. I's glad you fotch him back home an' buried him wid his own folks."

"Yes, we'll walk out to his grave together some day," Gaitskill murmured.

He rose and walked to the window. He looked out for a moment, then turned and handed Popsy the card on which he had written a few minutes before.

"I'll see you often, Popsy," he said. "Your old cabin is still at the foot of the hill by the old spring. It's unoccupied—move in as soon as you please."

"Whut is dis, Marse Tommy?" Popsy asked, as he looked curiously at the folded paper.

"It's an order on my store for food," Gaitskill said. "You can draw some groceries every Saturday night. That's part of the interest per annum, you know."

"Bless Gawd!" Popsy Spout quacked. "Ten dollars a month wages an' reg'lar rations eve'y Saddy night! You shore is a noble white man,

Marse Tommy! Come on, Scootie. Us'll git gwine befo' we gits happy an' gits to shoutin' an' bust up all de furnisher in dis white man's bank!"

"My Lawd, Figger Bush!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed, as his friend entered the Hen-Scratch saloon. "You look like a skint mule."

"I done disguised myse'f!" Figger grinned as he took off his battered wool hat.

Figger's famous shoe-brush mustache was gone, and his head was shaved until it was as smooth and slick as a black piano key.

"Whut you did yo'se'f so funny fer?" Skeeter demanded, as Figger smiled and revealed a row of teeth like new tombstones.

"I decided to stay in town an' be a corp'," Figger explained, "so I had myse'f fixed up so dat not even my widder would know me."

"Is you seed Popsy yit?" Skeeter asked.

"Yep. I hid behime de cornder of de deppo when de train trundled in, an' Popsy dismounted off. Scootie cried an' tuck on consid'able, an' I wus plum' satisfied wid de results."

"Did Popsy 'pear much broke up?" Skeeter inquired.

"I couldn't tell 'bout dat," Figger chuckled. "Scootie tuck him to her cabin fer dinner an' I seed 'em walkin' aroun' town—I s'pose dey is huntin' fer my grave."

"How do bein' a corp' feel like—so fur?" Skeeter snickered.

"'Tain't so bad," Figger remarked. "It

mought be better ef de town would take a notion to gib me a fust-class fun'ral. Of co'se, de Tickfall quawtette would hab to sing, an' I's de male serpranner in dat quawtette. It would be a real nice somepin new fer a corp' to sing at his own fun'ral."

"Mebbe us could git de Nights of Darkness to hold a lodge of sorrer on you," Skeeter cackled.

"Ef dey does, I wants to sing my new solo 'bout 'Locked in de stable wid de sheep,'" Figger announced.

"Whut about de death ben'fit?" Skeeter inquired. "Is you gwine apply fer dat?"

"Naw," Figger laughed. "Ef de committee 'vestigates an' repotes me dead, dey kin gib dat ben'fit to Popsy."

At this point the green-baize doors of the saloon were pushed open and Scootie Tandy blew in quivering with excitement.

"Whut's up, Scootie?" Skeeter exclaimed, springing to his feet.

"Gawd pity you, Figger!" Scootie howled in tragic tones. "You made a awful mistake in gwine dead so suddent!"

"Which way?" Figger asked in a frightened voice.

"I went to de bank wid Popsy Spout an' found out dat Popsy an' Marse Tom Gaitskill is kinnery!" Scootie gushed forth.

"Hear dat, now!" Skeeter exclaimed in a voice of wonder.

"Popsy gib Marse Tom a wad of money dat it took Popsy five days to count!" Scootie ranted.

"Oh, my *Lawd!*" Figger wailed.

"Marse Tom gib Popsy one hundred an' twenty dollars int'rust prannum on his money, an' a awder on de sto'-house fer reg'lar rations, an' a cabin to live in!" Scootie squalled.

"My gawsh!" Figger bleated in dismay. "I done busted a egg on my own doorstep an' hoo-dooed my own se'f!"

"Dat's whut you done, Figger!" Scootie howled. "I tole Popsy real prompt dat he needed a nuss an' housekeeper in his ole age, an' as Figger's widder I wus lawfully 'lected to dat job, an' he tuck me up right now!"

"Oh-huh!" Figger grunted in despair.

"Me an' Popsy is gwine move in de ole log hut behime Marse Tom's house to-morrer," Scootie exulted. "Ten dollars per month an' reg'lar vittles, chicken an' pie—I won't never hab to wuck no more."

"Lawdymussy!" Figger sighed.

"Good-by, niggers!" Scootie exclaimed in a happy voice. "I won't never reckernize you-alls no mo'—I draws a pension!"

She swept out of the house and left two men struck speechless by the information she brought.

A moment later they were interrupted again. Vinegar Atts plowed through the swinging doors, puffing like a steam-boat and sweating like an ice-pitcher.

"Whar kin I find Brudder Popsy Spout, Skeeter?" he bellowed. "I wants to 'vite him to jine de Shoofly chu'ch an' set heavy in de amen

corner. Dat's de biggest nigger whut ever come to dis town. Word is sont out dat he old-soldiered wid de Gaitskills—fit wid de white folks! I needs him in my chu'ch!"

Neither Skeeter nor Figger made a reply. Their air of tragedy silenced Vinegar Atts, and he crept forward on tiptoe to where the two men were sitting, smoking cigarettes and sighing. When Vinegar reached a point, where he could see the face of Figger Bush, he jumped as if he had seen a ghost.

"My—good—*gosh*, Figger!" Vinegar wailed in his siren-whistle voice. "You done suicided yo'se'f! Took five days to count his money—got it in de bank fetchin' int'rust—livin' in his own cabin an' drawin' rations—an' you is de only blood kin of Tickfall's leadin' nigger sitson an' you—is—dead!"

"Tell me whut to do, Revun?" Figger wailed.

"I ain't got time, Figger!" Atts bawled. "I got to tote a Christyum greetin' an' welcome to dat noble nigger man!"

Vinegar Atts went out of the saloon with the rolling walk of a big bear.

"Tell me whut to do, Skeeter!" Figger wailed.

"Search me!" Skeeter exclaimed. "'Tain't no trouble fer a nigger to die—dat comes nachel. But when a nigger tries to come to life an' make folks b'lieve it—Lawdy!"

"I's gwine right down an' see Popsy!" Figger announced with sudden determination. "I'll tell him dat Scootie is been lyin' to him all de time.

I kin prove by Marse Tom an' all de white folks dat I ain't never been dead a-tall!"

"I hopes you luck, Figger!" Skeeter exclaimed in a tone which indicated that he considered such an enterprise futile.

Figger lost no time in getting to the cabin where Scootie lived.

He found Popsy sitting upon the porch, smoking a corn-cob pipe which had been the property of Scootie's deceased husband, and languidly slapping at his face with a turkey-wing fan. His stove-pipe hat rested upon the floor at his feet and contained a big red handkerchief.

"Howdy, Popsy!" Figger greeted him cordially, holding out his hand. "Don't you reckomember me?"

The old man removed his pipe from his mouth, rested his turkey-wing fan upon his lap, reached for his long patriarchal staff as if he were about to rise; then he leaned back in his chair and surveyed Figger a long time.

"Naw, suh, I ain't never seed yo' favor befo'," he quavered.

"I's little Figger," Figger informed him ingratiatingly.

"Little Figger is dead," Popsy answered, looking at Bush with faded eyes, in which the light of doubt and suspicion and a little fear was growing. "I lives wid little Figger's widder."

"Dat's a mistake, Popsy," Figger protested. "I ain't died yit. Scootie's been lyin' to you 'bout me."

The old man leaned over and fumbled in the crown of his stove-pipe hat. He brought out his big red handkerchief, and slowly unwrapped the photograph which Scootie had given him when he first entered her home, a photograph of a negro with a woolly head and a shoe-brush mustache. Handing this to Figger, he asked sharply:

"Does you look like dat nigger in dat photygrapht?'

"Naw, suh," Figger replied with evident reluctance.

"Dat's de little Figger Bush I mourns," Popsy said. "Dat's Scootie's dead husbunt. You ain't look like him a bit—you look like a picked geese!"

"I's de very same man, Popsy!" Figger wailed in desperation. "Only but I done had my hair an' mustache cut off."

"I don't believe it!" Popsy declared in positive tones. "I raised dis here Figger Bush, an' I knows he never earnt enough money in his dum lazy life to commit a shave an' a hair-cut!"

"O Lawdy, whut muss I do?" Figger wailed.

"Git away from dis cabin an' don't never show yo'se'f here no mo'!" the old man howled. "I wouldn't b'lieve you wus Figger Bush ef you sweared on de Bible an' all de twelve opossums!"

Popsy pounded upon the floor of the porch with the end of his long staff.

"O Scootie!" he called. "Git outen dat kitchen an' come here a minute."

Hope flamed up in the heart of Figger. He knew that no one could convince Popsy that he

was not dead more certainly than the woman who pretended to be his widow.

Scootie came out upon the porch and gazed with popping eyes at Figger Bush.

"Is dis here nigger yo' dead husbunt?" Popsy snapped, pointing a palsied finger at Figger.

"Naw, suh," Scootie replied truthfully.

The old man stood up. He caught his long staff at the little end as a man grasps a baseball bat. He balanced it a moment, poising himself on his feet, as if he were getting ready to knock a "homer," aiming the stick at Figger's round, ball-like head!

"*Git out!*" Popsy whooped.

Figger got out.

Early the next morning Scootie sent two wagon-loads of household goods to the log cabin in the rear of Colonel Tom Gaitskill's home, where Popsy had taken his young wife fifty-five years before.

Scootie deposited these goods in the two front rooms, fixing them up so that Popsy would have a comfortable place after his arrival, and while she was arranging the rest of the rooms. In one room she placed a rickety sofa, a couple of chairs, and a table. She hung a few pictures on the wall, placed a few ornaments upon the mantelpiece, and from the spring beside the house she brought a pitcher of water, placed it on the table, and set a drinking glass beside it.

In the other room she set up Popsy's bed, placed

beside it the only comfortable rocking-chair she possessed, put Popsy's old, battered suit-case, which contained all his worldly goods, under the bed, and placed upon the mantelpiece all the tobacco and pipes which her late husband had left her.

Then she returned to her own cabin to superintend the removal of the remainder of her goods.

As she came into the yard, Popsy called to her from his seat on the porch.

"I ain't no good settin' here in dis rockin'-chair, Scootie. I'll be gittin' along to'des my own cabin!"

"Don't go yit, Popsy," Scootie begged. "Wait till de nex' wagon comes. I'll set de rockin' -chair up in de wagon an' let you ride to yo' cabin wid de load!"

"I ain't gwine do it!" the old man shouted irascibly. "I ain't gwine be kotch settin' up in a rockin'-chair in a wagon like a ole nigger woman ridin' to a all-day nigger fun'ral wid dinner on de grounds. I'll walk an' tote my own carcass to dat cabin, like a man!"

"Ef pore Figger wus livin', I'd git him to hitch up de kerridge an' drive you to de cabin," Scootie said mischievously.

"Huh!" the old man shouted. "Figger wouldn't hab sense enough to find my ole cabin. When de good Lawd passed aroun' brains, Figger had his head in a woodpecker's hole lookin' fer aigs!"

Muttering to himself in sheer perversity, he pranced down the road for a hundred yards or

so, then, out of sight of Scootie, he settled down to a sedate and dignified walk. In a little while he began to use his long staff, leaning heavily upon it as he climbed the long hill which led to the Gaitskill home.

At the foot of the hill he passed a negro sitting disconsolately upon the end of a log. He was a scarecrow sort of a negro, with ragged, flapping clothes; a close observer might have noticed that he had recently worn a stubby, shoe-brush mustache; his head was shaved as smooth and slick as a black piano-key.

"Good mawnin'," Popsy Spout quavered.

"Mawnin', Popsy," Figger murmured in a tragic tone—a voice from the tomb, a greeting from the dead!

The old man walked on, his step feebler now, his staff serving him more and more, his progress slower.

The August sun shone with scorching heat, the sunlight spraying from the leaves of the trees like water; the August breeze was like a breath from the open furnace-doors where iron is melted and flows like water; the sand of the highway was like embers scorching the feet. The old man staggered on, muttering to himself.

Figger Bush arose slinkingly and walked behind Popsy at a respectful distance, like a dog which had been whipped and told not to follow. He kept close to the high weeds and the bushes which grew beside the road, so that he could hide promptly if Popsy turned and looked back.

But Popsy did not look back. His age-dimmed eyes were set upon a big white house with large colonial columns which stood upon the top of the hill. Half a century had passed since he had seen this home last, and eagerness overcame his physical weakness and carried him to the hilltop where the beautiful lawn lay like a green carpet spread before the door.

Popsy leaned weakly upon the gate and gazed long and earnestly at the stately old home. He assumed the attitude of one who was listening for some familiar sound, and was perplexed because he could hear nothing.

Alas! Popsy was listening for footsteps that were silent and for voices which for fifty years had not been music in the porches of the ear! For a moment the old man had forgotten the years which had passed since last he saw this house, and he was listening for the voices of a young bride's father and mother, and for the laughter and shouting of three Gaitskill boys—Tom, Jim, Henry!

"I bound dem boys is huntin' squorls over in de swamp, or mebbe dey's monkeyin' aroun' dat wash-hole," the old man murmured doubtfully. "Dat house shore do 'pear powerful still 'thout dem noisy, aggervatin' bullies bellerin' to each yuther."

Popsy fumbled feebly through his pockets and brought his hands out empty.

"Dem dum boys is mighty stingy wid deir chawin' terbacker," he mumbled in an irritated

tone. "Dey don't gimme half enough to keep me runnin'! Sence Tom hitched up wid dat pretty Mis' Mildred, he done lef' off chawin', an dat cuts down my 'lowance. Nev' mind! I knows whar dem dum boys keep deir chawin', an' I'll 'vent some excuse to go to de house an' I'll holp myse'f liberal."

Suddenly Popsy Spout remembered certain boyish pranks which Tom and Jim and Henry had played upon him fifty years before. He dimly recalled finding his tables and chairs hanging from the limbs of trees, his bed carried over in the cow-pasture and placed in the middle of the field, his few cooking pots crowning the tops of fence-posts around his cabin!

"Hod zickety!" he exclaimed. "I bound dem rapscallions is pesticatin' my Ca'lline plum' to death!"

He turned away from the gate and hurried as rapidly as his feeble legs would carry him down the road.

When at last he reached the cabin, he sat down upon the big stone step completely exhausted.

A big pecan tree stood in front of the house, its wide-spreading branches completely shading the front yard. Under this tree three of Popsy's piccaninnies had romped, and countless generations of hound puppies had rolled in the dust, and scratched in the sand at its roots.

To Popsy's left was the big stone spring-house, the roof entirely gone, and leaves and branches had blown into the four walls and choked the stream which flowed from the hillside.

"I been aimin' to fix dat roof," Popsy murmured. "It 'pears like I cain't hardly find time to do nothin', I got to wuck fer de white folks so hard."

He turned and looked behind him.

Two doors opened out upon the front porch, and the two rooms visible to him were furnished. Having seen the furniture in Scootie's cabin, he recognized it now, and thought it was the furniture of his old home fifty years before.

Then one of the bizarre conceits of second childhood knocked upon the crumbling portals of his brain and found admittance. He thought that he was a young man again, and that the buxom negro girl whom he had married in the presence of the white folks up yonder on the hill in the drawing-room of the Gaitskill home, was still alive, and occupied this cabin with him.

"Ca'lline! Ca'lline!" he called sharply.

But Caroline, sleeping in her narrow, silent chamber under a scrub-oak tree on a hillside in Alabama, made no answer.

"Ca'lline!" he called again, in a voice which he tried to make loud, but which failed through weakness. "Ca'lline! Cain't you hear me callin' you?"

The old man stood up in perplexity. His fuddled brain could not grasp the reason for this silence and loneliness. He climbed feebly, with the aid of his staff, up the stone steps, and pounded loudly upon the crumbling floor of the porch.

"Oh, Ca'lline! Whar in dumnation is you gone at?"

He entered the room where Scootie had prepared his bed with the idea that he might want to lie down and rest after his trip to the cabin, and he took his seat in the comfortable rocking-chair, placing his stove-pipe hat beside him on the floor.

"Ca'lline!" he wailed. There was no answer to his call.

The fire of exasperation flamed in the ancient man's withered frame, and he manifested his annoyance by kicking his beloved stove-pipe hat across the room.

"Dag-gone de dag-gone day whut fotch me de dag-gone luck of totin' dat dag-gone fat nigger gal to my cabin!" he wailed. "*Ca'lline!* Whar in dumnation is you an' dem three nigger brats?"

He leaned back, resting his shaking, palsied head wearily against the chair.

"Dem chillun take atter deir maw," he commented. "Dey's gad-arounders!"

From the top of the big pecan tree a mocking-bird broke forth in delirious music. The loud, clear notes, imitating every bird which roamed the woods, echoed back from the woods and the hill-side, and broke in jewels of melody around the old log cabin.

The old man listened, sighed gratefully, and smiled.

"Dat's one of dem wuthless, no 'count piccaninnies a-comin' now," he muttered. "Dem chillun got deir whistlin' gift from deir paw. I could whistle jes' like dat befo' I loss all de toofs outen my head."

Instantly a footstep sounded in the rear of the house, and the door opened. Figger Bush entered the room and stopped near the door, looking at Popsy Spout with eyes as wistful as the eyes of a hound.

"Whar de debbil is you been at, Figger?" the old man howled. "I been callin' you all de mawnin'!"

"I been settin' aroun'," Figger muttered. "I's tired!"

"By dam'!" the old man snorted. "Mebbe yo' legs is a little feeble an' tired, but yo' stomick don't never weary none. Whut you been doin' in dat kitchen—eatin' or drinkin'?"

"Nothin'," Figger mumbled.

"Ef you been drinkin' dat dram agin, I'll find out about it!" Popsy ranted in the falsetto of senility. "Licker talks mighty loud when it gits loose from de jug, an' de fust time you whoops a yell I'll wallop yo' hide wid dis stick."

"Yes, suh," Figger murmured, rubbing his shaved head.

"Whar is yo' hair gone at?" Popsy howled, glaring at Figger's bald pate.

"Ole Mis' Mildred cut it off!" Figger prevaricated with a snicker. "She say she wanted to sot a hin an' needed my wool to make a nest."

"Huh!" the old man snorted in disgust. "It's a pity she didn't take one of dese here wooden teethpicks an' beat yo' brains out while she wus at it!"

Figger turned and started to go out.

"Hey, Figger!" Popsy squalled.

"Whut?" Figger asked.

"You stay aroun' dis cabin so you kin wait on me!"

"Yes, suh," Figger grinned.

"Ef you leave dis house 'thout axin' my say-so, I'll skin you alive!"

"I ain't gwine leave you, Popsy," Figger assured him. "Nobody cain't git me away from dis cabin widout compellment!"

The mocking-bird in the top of the pecan tree started again its song of delirious music.

"Go out an' tell dat brat to stop dat whistlin' so I kin take me a nap!" Popsy commanded, as his weary head rested upon the back of the chair and he closed his age-dimmed eyes.

Figger stooped and picked up Popsy's big red handkerchief and passed out. He sat down upon the steps of the porch and unwrapped from the kerchief a cheap photograph of a man with a shoe-brush mustache and a woolly, kinky head. He gazed upon the picture for a long time, then tore it into tiny bits and tossed the fragments over in the high grass.

"Dat kind of Figger Bush is dead!" he announced to himself, while in his eyes there glowed the light of a great resolution. "I's related to Popsy by bornation, an' me an' Popsy is kinnery of de Gaitskills by fightin' wid de white folks endurin' of de war. Us is all quality niggers, an' we got to ack like we wus white!"

On top of the hill Figger heard the rumbling of

two wagons, bringing the last of Scootie's household goods to her new home.

"Won't de widder be supprised!" Figger chuckled. "Bless Gawd! I ain't as dead as she an' me thought I wus!"

He sat chuckling to himself until he recalled Popsy's last command, and sprang to his feet.

"He tole me not to let nothin' disturb his nap!" he muttered, as he walked rapidly up the hill toward the wagons. "Now I's gwine gib de widder de wust jolt she ever got in her life!"

He hid behind a large tree until the first wagon came to where he was standing. Scootie was driving, and she looked like one who had suddenly come into possession of a great treasure.

"Hol' on a minute, Scootie!" Figger exclaimed, stepping from behind the tree. "Popsy sont me up here to tell you not to disturb him till he tuck a leetle nap!"

"'Tain't so!" Scootie snapped. "Popsy don't know yo' favor or yo' face!"

But as she looked at Figger Bush she knew beyond a doubt that he was installed in his grandfather's cabin. Figger's face glowed with a light of happiness and peace, and there was even something in the face which held the promise of a new manhood through the influence of the grand old man who now lay asleep in the cabin.

Scootie began to weep.

"I reckin I'll hab to take my furnicher an' move out, Figger," she sobbed. "I kinder hoped I could live wid Popsy an' take keer of him, an'

make him happy in his ole age—but all dat wus too much luck fer Scootie!"

"'Twouldn't be mo' dan you deserve, Scootie," Figger said in a pleading tone. "An' I b'lieve you an me could fix it up so dat it wouldn't be onpossible!"

"How?" Scootie asked.

"Leave dem mules standin' here in de shade, go wid me to de cotehouse an' git some weddin' licenses, an' git Vinegar Atts to marrify us!" Figger suggested.

Scootie promptly hit the ground with both feet, landing by the side of Figger Bush.

"Come on, honey!" she said, seizing him by the hand. "Less go quick!"

"Kin I go, too?" Little Bit, the driver of the second wagon asked in a whining tone. No answer was given to him, so he jumped down and followed.

From the top of the hill, they looked down to where the red brick court-house baked in the summer sun. Side by side they started toward the court-house, and the new life.

On the other side of the hill, sole guardian of the grand old man in the cabin, the mocking-bird sat in the pecan tree and sang its song of love.

Hoodoo Eyes.

THE swinging doors of the Hen-Scratch saloon fell apart and Conko Mukes walked in.

He was a large man and, to look at, very impressive.

The negroes in Tickfall had never seen clothes like his, so large in stripe and so variegated in color. On either lapel of his coat was a large, brassy emblem of some secret lodge.

On the middle finger of each hand was a rolled-gold band ring nearly an inch wide. Across the vast expanse of his sky-muckle-dun-colored waistcoat was a gangrened near-gold watch-chain like the cable chain of a Mississippi River steamboat, and a charm suspended from it was constructed of the talons of an eagle.

His ponderous feet shook the floor as he walked across the saloon and seated himself at a table. Removing his stove-pipe hat, he placed that upon one chair, kicked another chair from under the table on which to deposit his feet, and leaned back in a third chair, with his gorilla-like arms resting comfortably across the back of a fourth. The barroom appeared to be empty.

"Hey, dar! Come here—eve'ybody!" he bellowed.

Skeeter Butts peeped at Conko Mukes around the corner of the bar behind which he was sitting.

The black face which he beheld advertised unmistakably what Conko Mukes was. It was the mug of a typical prize-fighter.

The face was clean-shaven, accentuating a jaw, heavy, brutal, aggressive. His head was also shaven, and every bump on his villainous cranium stood forth like a promontory on a level plain. His eyes were heavy-lidded, lazy, sleepy-looking, like the eyes of a lion.

The nose had been broken and was crooked; his thick lips had been battered in many fights until they were shapeless, and the mouth was simply an ugly gash across his face. And to complete the adornment, one ear was "tin" and the other was cauliflower, both permanently disfigured and disfiguring.

Conko Mukes moved in his chair as if burdened by the heavy weight of his muscles, and his heavy-lidded eyes glowed yellow in the dim light of the saloon as he glared around him. Again his voice boomed:

"Hey! Am eve'ybody done hauled off an' died? Come out here, Skeeter Butts—whut's hidin' you?"

"I guess dis is my move-up," Skeeter remarked as he pocketed a handful of silver which he had been counting behind the bar and came to the table.

Conko watched the diminutive darky until he stopped by his table. Then the lazy, lion-like

eyes glowed with a yellow fire, and with a slapping motion of his monstrous hand he exclaimed:

"Shoo, fly, don't bodder me!"

Skeeter Butts cackled like a nervous hen, fluttered well out of reach of that hand, and snickered:

"Lawd, Conko, you sho' is one powerful funny man! Dat gits you a free-fer-nothin' drink. You is better'n a show-actor."

"You done kotch de lizard by de tail, son—kotch him de fust time," Conko informed him in deep, rumbling bellow. "I is a holy show!"

"How is you feelin' to-day, Conko?" Skeeter asked as he set the drink before him.

"I feels like I is sorry I wus borned to die!" Conko answered, swallowing the raw whisky with one gulp and with a dry eye. "How is de bettin' gittin' on?"

"De niggers takes up eve'y bet, Conko," Skeeter replied. "You see, dis here Hitch Diamond—nobody ain't never knocked him out yit!"

"He ain't never fit nobody yit," Conko remarked easily. "Befo' dis day is over I'll make him wish he'd been borned a little nigger gal!"

"I hopes so," Skeeter said with a nervous flutter in his tone. "I done bet de limit. Ef it ain't a win wid you, I's gwine hab de misforchine to lose fawty dollars."

With a pompous air Conko Mukes thrust his hand into his pocket and brought out a large roll of bills which had been carefully wrapped around a fat corn-cob. He tossed it across the table.

"Dar am fifteen dollars whut you kin bet fer me, Skeeter. Dat many money says to you dat I's gwine make Hitch Diamond dig a hole in de groun' to git away from de Georgia Cyclome."

"Hitch specify dat he gwine rub his gloves wid hoodoo-juice," Skeeter said as he fumbled with the corn-cob. "Ain't you got no stunts like dat to pull on?"

Conko Mukes opened his eyes with a sudden and tremendous interest. He sat for a moment in deep thought. Then he answered in a regretful tone:

"Naw, suh, I ain't never studied 'bout dat befo'. I don't depen' on no hoodoo-juice. I depen's on elbow-grease! I fights straight, and hits hard, an' knocks 'em out on de level."

"Yes, suh, elbow-grease is powerful good," Skeeter said uneasily; "but I figgers dat us oughter hab all de he'p we kin git! Of co'se, I don't b'lieve in no hoodoo myse'f, but——"

"Us don't need no hoodoo," Conko interrupted. "Let Hitch Diamond git it. He needs it. He don't know it yit, but he needs a dorctor, a preacher, a undertaker, an' a nice, deep grave in de cem'-tery!"

"I wouldn't be so powerful shore 'bout dat, Conko," Skeeter suggested. "You ain't never seed dat Hitch Diamond pufform."

"Whut sort lookin' coon is he?" Conko asked.

"He's mo' tall dan you, wider dan you, heavier dan you is. He's got arms long enough to hug a elerphunt aroun' de stomick."

"I'll break dem long arms in fo' pieces an' wrop 'em aroun' Hitch's neck like a mournin' rag," Conko declared.

"Hitch kin put his hands on yo' head an' mash yo' face plum' down in yo' stomick—jes' like you wus a mud-turkle!" Skeeter said.

"He won't git no chance to mash," Conko assured him. "I'll make him think he's got bofe hands tied behime him an' bofe behime foots kotch in a bear-trap."

"Hitch won't take but two licks at you," Skeeter continued. "One'll be a up-cut whut'll punch you in de air like a balloom; den he'll take a side-swipe at you when you is comin' down, an' phish!—you'll be over on de yuther side of Jordan!"

"Huh!" Conko grunted. "Whut you reckin I'll be doin' to him when I's comin' down?"

"De las' time Hitch had a prize-fight," Skeeter remarked, as he tried to roll a cigarette with fingers which trembled and spilled all the tobacco, "he specify dat he didn't need but one glove, an' he made em tie it on his *elbow*. He fiddled aroun' an' dodged dat big stiff till de nigger got in reach of dat elbow; den Hitch gib him a little jab in his soul-complexion, an' dat nigger went to heaben fer a week!"

"Huh!" Conko grunted. "Hitch'll need gloves on his elbows to-day, too. But he'll want 'em to keep him from hurtin' his crazy-bones when I knocks him down."

"Hitch Diamond challenged Jack Johnsing,"

Skeeter declared. "An' you know whut dat nigger champeen of de worl' went an' done? He got on a big ferry-boat an' went to Framce an' specify dat he wustn't never comin' back to dis country no mo'!"

"Jack Johnsing got skeared too soon," Conko replied easily. "I always said he had a yeller streak."

"I seed Hitch fight a bear once," Skeeter informed him. "He kotch dat bear by de tail, an' dat bear gib one loud squall an' drug Hitch plum' to Arkansas befo' Hitch could let loose his handholt!"

"Huh," Conko grunted, undismayed. "I ain't got no tail."

Skeeter stopped. His thought could go no higher. His imagination could reach no further.

Conko lighted a big cigar and puffed smoke like a steam-engine. He laid two monstrous hands, palm upward, upon the table between them and remarked:

"Dese here hands needs exoncise, Skeeter. Hitch Diamond is shore gwine make a good punchin' bag."

"I hopes you gits yo' punch in fust," Skeeter sighed, wishing that he had not bet so heavily.

"Whut's de matter wid you?" Conko Mukes bawled. "Is you gittin' cold foots?"

"Naw. Nothin' like dat," Skeeter hastened to assure him, "but——"

"'Tain't no need to git anxious," Conko declared as he rose to go. "You go out an' bet my

money, an' remember dat de Georgia Cyclome is a real twister."

"Hitch is a stem-winder, too," Skeeter declared.

As Conko Mukes tramped out of the saloon, Skeeter Butts wiped the clammy sweat from his face and sighed.

"My Lawd!" he moaned. "I tried to skeer dat nigger up so he'd be keerful, but Conko don't take no skeer. Leastwise, he don't talk dat way. I got de hunch dat he ain't nothin' but beef an' wind an' a loud noise. I bet I's gwine lose eve'y bet whut I done bet. Dat's de bes' bet I could bet!"

"Huh!" Conko Mukes meditated as he walked slowly toward that portion of Tickfall inhabited by the whites. "Dat Skeeter Butts specify dat Hitch Diamond is some fightin' coon. I wish I hadn't bet dem fifteen dollars; I cain't affode to lose 'em. I needs he'p. Wonder whar I could git some of dat hoodoo-juice?"

Professor Dodo Zodono, medium, magician, hypnotist, stood on a box in front of the Tickfall drug-store, adjusted the joints of his flute, and placed it to his lips. The sweet, piercing notes quickly drew a crowd around him.

The professor was tall and thin, with long black hair, big black eyes, a long mustache, and long, snaky fingers. His black clothes appeared to hang upon his emaciated form like draperies, a circumstance which helped him greatly in his sleight-of-hand tricks.

Two assistants stood on the ground beside the box. Both were tall and very thin, with lank, damp hair and listless, humid eyes, and tallow-colored skin always moist with nervous sweat—you have seen many like them lying in hypnotic sleep in some show window, or have peered down a wooden chute to see them slumbering in a coffin six feet under the ground.

When the music ended Professor Zodono handed his flute to one of his assistants and began his spiel:

"Fellow citizens, I have called you together to give you a little demonstration of my powers.

"We are surrounded by mystery. There is a vast realm of the unknown which science has not explored. I shall demonstrate to you to-night that we have not yet even reached the edge of the great ocean of discovery—price of admission, fifteen and twenty-five cents!

"I shall show you wonders which cannot be accounted for. You will hear sounds which defy the laws of acoustics. You will behold appearances which fly in the face of investigation, and effects which do not appear to have a sufficient cause—all for the insignificant price of fifteen and twenty-five cents!

"I shall now give you a free demonstration of hypnotism. This is no new thing, and I do not charge you a cent to see an old and familiar stunt. It is nothing but a nervous sleep induced by the active mind of the operator upon the subjective consciousness of the hypnotic. This power has been known to the world for eighteen hundred

years. Under this influence, the operator can make his subject dance, sing, speak, or perform any stunt he pleases. In New York, Dr. Meseran hypnotized Sandow, the modern Samson, and that giant who could lift three hundred pounds above his head with one hand could not even lift his hand to his head to scratch his ear——"

At this point there was a slight commotion in the closely packed crowd in front of Zodono. A giant darky gorgeously dressed was pressing himself to the front. It was Conko Mukes.

His manner and speech, as he pushed aside both whites and blacks, were the very apotheosis of deference and courtesy:

"'Scuse me, boss! Beg parding, kunnel! Fer Gawd's sake, don't lemme disturb you-alls! Gotter git to de drug-sto' prompt, cap'n. Please, suh, let a po' mis'ble nigger git by fer de white folks' med'cine. Thank 'e, suh, de Lawd is shore gwine bless you fer dis nigger's sake."

By the time Conko Mukes was within four feet of the box on which Zodono stood, the professor had resumed his speech and the crowd had forgotten the interruption. Mukes stopped where he was and listened.

"Every positive character in the world has this power of hypnotism over every negative character," the professor proclaimed. "It is the simple power of mind over mind by suggestion—all of which I shall prove to you to-night at the opera-house for a few nickels admission—price, fifteen and twenty-five cents!"

At this point one of the professor's assistants walked toward the box, his feet dragging and moving as if some one had him by the shoulders, leading him forward. His thin arms dangled at his sides, and his bony fingers twitched and writhed like the tail of a snake.

He climbed upon the box with awkward movements as if the joints of his shoulders and hips were stiff and the hinges rusty, and they hurt him.

He walked slowly, reluctantly toward Zodono, and the professor threw up his hand, snapped his fingers, and cried "Stop!"

The assistant flinched, dodged like a dog, and the crowd snickered.

"My Gawd!" Conko Mukes mumbled in a low tone. "Look at dat!"

For a moment the professor glared in the eyes of his assistant; then his hands began making slow, stroking motions downward before the subject's face. Red spots came and went in the bleached cheeks of the hypnotic; his breath was short and quick; his nostrils and lips were pinched.

The crowd looked on breathlessly as the hand of the professor, fingers outstretched, clawed the air before that weak, chalky face, with its twitching lips and feeble, trembling chin.

"Ah!" the professor exclaimed theatrically, grinning his triumph in the face of the crowd.

"Ah!" the crowd echoed with an expulsive sound of breath released after a moment of breathless attention.

The man stood before them, asleep on his feet, his body waving slowly like a feather suspended from a thread and gently wafted by a slight breeze.

The druggist and his two clerks came out, picked up the hypnotic, who was as stiff as a board; carried him into the drug-store, and laid him flat on his back in the show window.

Then the druggist unfolded a sheet, covered the body, tucked the covering close around the sleeper's chalky face, and stepped across the store to the soda-fountain with an eye alert and a hand ready for trade.

"Remember, gents!" Professor Zodono exclaimed. "An educational and instructive show for men, women, and children—opera-house tonight at eight o'clock sharp—fifteen and twenty-five cents!"

Then, followed by his other assistant, the professor walked slowly up the street to the opera-house to dress the stage for his evening's performance.

They were followed at a respectful distance by Conko Mukes.

The moment the two men had passed out of sight through the stage entrance in the alley by the Gaitskill store, Conko Mukes knocked on the door.

"Open up, Bill!" Zodono commanded. "I guess that is the nigger washwoman come after those curtains."

When Conko Mukes entered, Zodono came forward.

"Have you come after the washing?" he asked.

Conko Mukes took off his hat, and his immense

mouth with its mashed and shapeless lips spread wide in an ugly grin.

"Don't you know me, Mister Jimmy?" Conko asked.

"My Lord!" Zodono exclaimed after a moment's inspection. "You damn' ole coon! What you doing in this place, Conko?"

"I had to take a good riddunce of Georgia, Mr. Jimmy," Conko growled, grinning like a bear. "De gram jury lawed me all de time an' dat place got too hot. How is all de white folks an' de niggers in Tupelo?"

"Fine—when I saw them last," Zodono grinned. "The grand jury lawed me, too, and I left."

"Is dat how come you change yo' name?" Conko asked in polite tones.

"Oh, no; it wasn't as bad as that," Zodono laughed. "But I could never make any money in my business with my real name. A spiritualistic medium, fortune-teller, magician, and hypnotist named Jim Skaggs—that would never do. What are you doing here?"

"I'se prize-fightin', Mr. Jimmy. I been fightin' up'n down de Mississippi River, an' I come here to git a fight dis atternoon wid a nigger named Hitch Diamond."

"How did you like my show out in front?" Zodono asked.

"It wus fine, Mr. Jimmy!" Conko exclaimed in enthusiastic tones. "Dat's how come I wants to see you. I would like to 'terrogate you 'bout dat show."

"What do you want to know?"

"Whut I axes you is dis," Conko began; "you s'pose a nigger could learn how to hypnertize like you?"

Zodono looked at Bill, his assistant, and winked. Then he answered:

"Certainly, Conko."

"How is it did, boss?" the negro asked eagerly.

Zodono looked at the negro for a moment then grinned. He looked at Bill and Bill grinned back. Here was a chance to have some fun.

"You're getting ready to pull some hypnotic stunt in that prize-fight this afternoon, ain't you Conko?" the professor asked.

"Yes, suh," Conko chuckled like a rumbling train. "I figger ef I could put dat fightin' coon to sleep like you done dat white boy in front of de drug-sto', dat I could knock him out widout wastin' so much wind an' elbow-grease."

"Well," Professor Zodono began, "first you walk straight up to the subject and look into his eyes."

"Which eye does you look at his eyes wid?" Conko asked.

"Both eyes—your own eyes!" Zodono explained.

"Yes, suh."

"Then you make a stroking motion in front of his face with the fingers of your hand extended like you were combing wool——"

"Yes, suh; you paws at him."

"Then you bring your dominant will to bear

upon the subject's subconscious mind, willing him to sleep—to stand upright and sleep——"

"Dat sounds easy," Conko grinned.

"Do you think you could do that?" Zodono inquired.

"Suttinly. Dat is—mebbe so. I'd shore like to try it one time befo' I hypnertized dat fightin' coon——"

"All right. I'll let you try it on a white man. If you can hypnotize a white man, you can certainly come it over on a nigger. We'll try it on Bill."

Zodono turned and glanced at his assistant. That glance was like the stroke of a whip-lash, and Bill quailed and flinched, the grin faded from his face, and the flush changed to a deadly pallor.

"Now, Conko," Zodono commanded. "Walk right up to Bill. Look straight into his eyes."

Bill stood like a rag doll, or anything else you can think of which is spineless and helpless and non-resistant.

Conko walked up and glared into Bill's listless, humid eyes like a monstrous, bloodthirsty gorilla eying a wax dummy. Bill did not see the negro, for unknown to Conko, the tall form of Zodono stood just behind him, and the professor's eyes held the hypnotic as a snake charms a bird.

"Now," Zodono commanded in sharp tones to the darky, "make a stroking motion before his face—slow—slow—slow. Now bring your will to bear upon his subconscious mind—that's it. Sleep—sleep—sleep—ah!"

With a horrified expression upon his face, Conko stood staring at the face of the man before him. The hypnotic slowly teetered forward and backward, threatening with each swaying movement to lose his balance and tumble over.

"Catch him!" Zodono commanded sharply.

Conko sprang forward and eased the falling man to the floor.

"My Gawd!" a strange negro voice exclaimed. "Did anybody ever see de beat of dat?"

Professor Zodono wheeled and stared at the frightened face of a large, full-bosomed, golden-brown girl, whose long, straight, black hair clung around her face, by contrast making her octoroon complexion almost white. Her bold, black eyes were big with wonder and awe, and the hands clasped over her bosom were trembling.

"What do you want?" Zodono snapped.

"I come fer de washin'," the girl stammered; "but I wants to git outen here real prompt."

"Don't be afraid," the professor said, as he walked over to a table where a pile of soiled curtains were stacked. "That man is not dead; just sleeping."

The girl backed around behind Zodono and peeped at Conko.

"Kin dat nigger wake dat white man up?" she asked.

"Yes," Zodono answered. Then he called to Mukes: "Wake him up, Conko!"

Conko leaned over, shook Bill by the shoulder, and bellowed:

"Git up, Mr. Bill! De bossman say fer you to git up!"

But Bill slept on. Zodono laughed.

"Bring your dominant mind to bear upon his subjective consciousness, Conko," he grinned.

Conko grabbed Bill on each side of his face, glared into his eyes, and howled:

"Hey, Bill; git up! Don't you hear me tellin' you? Wake up!"

While this was going on, Zodono asked the girl:

"What is your name?"

"Dey calls me Goldie," she answered, staring at Conko Mukes.

"All right, Goldie. Be sure to bring the curtains back to-morrow."

But Goldie was not listening. She was watching Conko struggling with the inert form of Bill.

Finally Conko stood up and strode toward the exit, his ugly black face frightened and uneasy.

"What's the matter, Conko?" Zodono called. "Going?"

"Yes, suh. I's gwine, Mr. Jimmy," Conko answered nervously. "I—I—done got dat white man hypped, an' I—I—cain't unhyp him!"

Without waiting for a reply, Conko passed out of the theater, trotted down the crooked alley, and hastened to the Hen-Scratch saloon.

"Skeeter!" he boomed. "If you got any money to bet, you bet it on me! I's gwine to pull a stunt on dat Hitch Diamond dis atternoon whut'll make all de coons in Tickfall think I done borrered de debbil's own knockout draps!"

A short distance from Tickfall where the Dorfoche Bayou widened into a small lake, and where pine-trees grew thick and shady upon a sandy plain was the negro baseball park and picnic grounds.

Hundreds of negroes had assembled here to witness the prize-fight between Hitch Diamond, the Tickfall Tiger, and Conko Mukes, the Georgia Cyclone. The women were as numerous as the men, and all were betting wildly on the result.

Skeeter Butts, backing Conko Mukes, was in a blue funk.

He had bet forty dollars, and called that the limit until Conko informed him that he possessed a hoodoo-stunt which would decide the contest in his own favor; then Skeeter had hazarded sixty dollars more. He found takers so readily that he had lost all courage and enthusiasm for his pugilist. He considered his money as good as gone.

A rude, squared ring had been roped off on the edge of the little lake by the simple process of stretching the rope from one sapling to another as a woman fixes a clothes-line. The ground, rising from the edge of the water presented a natural amphitheater for the accommodation of the spectators.

Many a prize-fight had occurred at this spot, in most of which the whites had taken a prominent part, being interested spectators and extravagant gamblers. But to-day no white people were on the ground.

When Hitch Diamond emerged from the plum-

thicket which had served for a dressing-room, his seconds behind him, and stalked through the crowd to the ring, a wild burst of greeting and applause went up from his waiting fellow townsmen, all of whom, except Skeeter Butts and Figger Bush, had backed him to the limit at any odds.

Hitch bowed right and left, waved his giant arms at the people on the edge of the crowd, and listened with hungry ears to their pleas:

"We're bettin' on you, Hitch; don't make us lose our money!"

"Knock him out, Hitchey! Den us'll all be rich!"

Hitch ducked through the ropes and walked to his corner, where he sat down upon a folding stool.

Vinegar Atts, the referee, came over and shook Hitch by the hand. Atts was a broken-down pugilist whom the Lord had called to preach after his last K. O., and he and Hitch were great friends.

"How you feelin', Hitchey?" Vinegar wanted to know.

"Feel as sweet as a fly in a vat of merlasses," Hitch grinned.

"Don't let yo' knock-out punch git sour," Vinegar grinned. "I got all my loose change on you."

There was another roar of applause, and Conko Mukes emerged from his plum-thicket and came through the crowd, his knotty, shaved head shining in the sun like a block of ivory. His scarred and villainous face, with its mashed lips and broken

nose and iron jaw, glowed with excitement and enthusiasm.

The mob applauded without partizanship as he climbed through the ropes and sat down in his corner.

Each pugilist eyed the other curiously, but neither could see much, for both were swathed in horse-blankets.

Prince Total and a scar-faced negro named Possum, Hitch Diamond's seconds, slipped on Hitch's gloves and laced them tight, while Skeeter Butts and Figger Bush performed the same office for Conko Mukes.

Then the seconds removed the heavy woolen horse-blankets, and the two fighters stood forth in their ring costumes, visible in all their fighting strength for the first time to the crowd—both men deep-chested, heavy-thewed, with muscles which moved like live snakes under their black-satin skins, their bodies acrawl with life and brutal power.

The two men advanced and touched gloves.

Then something happened which would make old John L. Sullivan laugh till he dislocated his iron jaw.

You who follow the fistic combats of Jess Willard and other white hopes and hopelessnesses, know that for months before the combatants meet in the ring their press-agents are busy informing the public what each pugilist says he expects to do to his opponent.

In the negro prize-fights in the South, the

pugilist, lacking the press-agent, demands the right to make a speech before each round of the fight, in which he tells his friends and backers what he expects to do to his opponent in the next round.

Can you beat that?

So, in accordance with this custom, after the two fighters had touched gloves, Hitch Diamond went back to his corner and sat down.

Conko Mukes stepped to the middle of the ring and bellowed:

"I's de great unwhupped Tuskeegee Cyclome. I fights any nigger whut misdoubts my words! I's de brayin' jackass of Georgia, an' no nigger in Tickfall cain't comb my mane!"

He sprang up, cracked his heels together, waved his gorilla-like arms in the air, and uttered a piercing whoop which echoed like a steam-whistle far down the Dorfoche Bayou.

Thereupon Hitch Diamond sprang to his feet and howled:

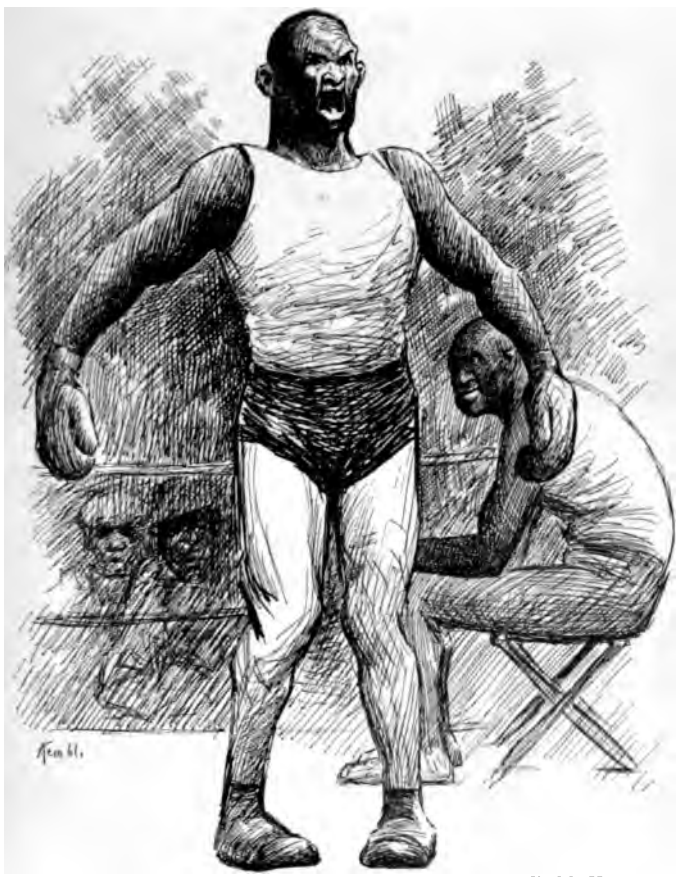
"I fights any nigger in the worl' fer two bits, fer a chaw terbaccer, fer a watermillyum rind, fer de tail of a tadpole!"

He jumped three feet in the air, cracked his heels together like two clapboards, and shrieked:

"I's de Tickfall Tiger, an' I kin curry dat Georgia jackass fo' inches under his hide!"

Then the seconds clattered out of the ring with their folding stools, and the two men advanced and took their fighting attitudes.

Pap Curtain picked up a baseball bat and struck



Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

"I'se de braying jack-ass of Georgia, an' no nigger in Tickfall cain't comb my mane."

a large wagon-tire suspended from a tree on the edge of the bayou. This was the gong.

"Time!" the referee shouted.

"Go fer his stomick, Conko!" Skeeter Butts squealed. "Hit an' duck! It's de best thing you kin do!"

Conko hit and ducked; and Hitch Diamond was jarred to the very marrow of his bones. A cold fury took the place of Hitch's smile.

"Go atter him! Foller him up!" Skeeter squealed.

Conko shot a right hook at Hitch, who neatly side-stepped; then Hitch swung a terrible left-hand blow at the giant figure before him.

"Right cross—lef' hook, Hitch—dat'll fix him!" Prince Total barked.

Conko ducked and saved his jaw, but the blow landed on the side of his head. It was too high up to be vitally effective, but powerful enough to bring a black veil of unconsciousness across Conko's mind. All faces vanished for a second; even Hitch Diamond disappeared; then when Hitch reappeared, Conko pecked savagely at his stomach.

Hitch panted like a winded dog; they clinched, and Hitch, with his gorilla reach, pounded his enemy over the kidneys.

"Hey, dar! Break 'em! No fair hittin' in clinches!" the crowd of Conko backers yelled.

Vinegar Atts grinned, yanked the pair out of the clinch, and a wolflike howl rose from the crowd. Hitch Diamond had landed a mighty

blow in Conko's stomach, and the Georgia Cyclone had fallen to his knees!

Vinegar Atts began to count:

"Fo'—five—six—seben—eight——"

"Git up, Conko!" Skeeter Butts screamed in agony. "Fer Gawd's sake——"

"Nine——"

Conko's leap upward at this word carried him within striking distance of Hitch Diamond, and the crowd yelled wildly at a whirlwind rush which sent Hitch slipping and leaping like a flying shuttle to guard himself from the wild insurgence of that furious onslaught.

The end of the round found both combatants laughing.

Skeeter Butts, for his part, was alternately sweating cold and hot, and as nervous as a cat amid a pack of pop-crackers.

The two men sat down in their corners, lying back with outstretched legs, resting their arms outstretched upon the ropes, gulping in the air fanned at them from the towels of the seconds. Their eyes were closed, and the roar of the crowd was a mighty thunder in their ears.

The gong struck, and Conko Mukes stepped to the middle of the ring.

"I done got dis here Hitch Diamond's number!" he bawled. "Hitch ain't nothin' but a big gob of meat, an' I's gwine fry him in his own grease! Ef you got any money to bet, bet it all on me. I's de wild ole ram of de Georgia swamp, an' no nigger cain't pick de cockle-burs outen my wool!"

He bent his huge body, ducked his head in excellent imitation of a sheep, and bleated loud enough to be heard a mile.

Hitch Diamond sprang to his feet and whooped:

"I's de swamp wildcat whut kin claw de cockleburs outen dat ole buck's wool!"

He screamed in perfect imitation of a Louisiana panther and met Conko Mukes in the middle of the ring.

Then Hitch Diamond presented a wonderful exhibition of skill and quickness, going in and out again, landing a blow to the eyes, to the jaw, to the ribs, ducking a counter, dancing lightly away, dancing lightly in, with quick, deft, dangerous blows, rushing things, and waiting for an opening left by that slow-moving man before him.

That opening came, and Hitch's right arm flashed into it, a right hook with all the weight of his pouncing body behind it. Conko Mukes fell like the rotten trunk of a tree falls in the forest. The crowd sighed like a great furnace, and a ripple of awestricken applause began close to the ringside and rolled like a wave to the edge of the amphitheater.

As Conko took the count, a golden-brown girl with large, bold, black eyes and long, straight, coal-black hair which made her octoroon complexion appear almost white, walked up close to the ring. The hands clasped over her full bosom were trembling, and her eyes glowed like coals of fire.

It was Goldie, Hitch Diamond's wife.

"Look out, Hitchey!" she exclaimed. "Don't

let dat Conko Mukes git too close to you! Knock him out in dis round! I knows somepin 'bout him dat you don't know!"

"He don't look so awful dangersome now, Goldie," Hitch replied, grinning at his wife, as she stood by the ropes.

Conko Mukes had rolled over and knelt on one knee, listening as Vinegar Atts stood over him counting in a loud voice. At the ninth he arose.

Springing across the ring with lightning quickness, Conko landed a blow on Hitch's jaw just as he turned away from his wife; with a grunt, Hitch fell flat to the ground within reach of Goldie's hand. But the blow had been too hastily delivered and missed the point of the jaw by an inch. In an instant Hitch was up and fighting like a panther.

The rest of the round was a nigger whirlwind finish. The darkies grappled like clumsy grizzlies, punching, biting, wrestling, growling ferociously. Around and around, they butted and pushed, bellowing and braying, striking any sort of blows, landing them everywhere they could, while the crowd cheered each man as he gained a slight advantage without partizanship.

When the men retired to their corners the crowd went mad, and the voices were yelling: "Go it, Hitch!" "Knock his block off, Conko!" "Kill him dead, Hitch!" "You'll git him in de nex' round, Conko!"

As for Skeeter Butts, he could have qualified for the lunatic asylum.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Conko," he chattered, "ef

you got any hoodoo stunts to wuck on Hitch, you better wuck 'em. Dat nigger's done had you down two times——"

"Aw, shut up!" Conko rumbled as he breathed in the air from Skeeter's flapping towel. "I's gwine pull dat stuff in de nex' round. I's savin' it fer de third, because de third time is de charm."

"De Lawd'll shorely bless you fer sayin' that, Conko," Skeeter panted, with tears in his eyes. "My Gawd, ef us don't win, I'll sho' wish I'd been borned a corn-field mule!"

The gong sounded for the third round.

Conko Mukes stepped in the middle of the ring and howled:

"In dis here nex' roun' I's gwine win out. I's gwine hypnertize dis here Hitch Diamond an' put him to sleep. I'll take one look at his ugly mug wid my right eye, an' he'll stan' up in dis ring like a dead man on his foots——"

"My Gawd, Hitchey!" Goldie screamed as she pressed through the crowd and grabbed the ropes by Hitch. "Look out fer dat nigger! He'll git you hypped, an' he cain't unhyp you!" Then she turned and ran toward Tickfall like a yellow streak.

"Dat's right, sister!" Conko Mukes bellowed as he watched her departure. "You don't 'pear to be anxious to stay an' see it done, but dat's yo' Uncle Conko's little game! Dis here Hitch Diamond is gwine to sleep, an' I don't keer ef he never wakes up!"

As Conko sat down Hitch arose and smiled at the crowd.

"I never goes to sleep till I wins!" he bawled. "Conko is done made a miscue 'bout who is gwine take a nap. I's de real old fat mammy whut'll sing li'l' baby Conko to sleep!"

Thereupon Conko Mukes performed a stunt which had never before been witnessed in a pugilistic ring, and which Conko in his subsequent career never attempted to duplicate.

He sprang toward Hitch Diamond, sparred for a moment, clinched, and shrieked like a calliope:

"Sleep! Sleep! Sleep, Hitch Diamond—go to sleep!"

This wonderful performance scared Hitch Diamond nearly out of his wits.

He broke from the clinch, smashed Conko against the ropes, and then began hooking and driving all sorts of blows against him, tearing himself out of Conko's frenzied clinches, punching him, shoving him against the ropes again and again until the cypress saplings to which the ropes were attached bowed beneath the storm and weight of human contestants.

Through it all, like some mighty chant, the stentorian voice of Conko rumbled the dreadful malediction:

"Sleep! Sleep! Go to sleep, Hitch Diamond —sleep!"

But Hitch never rested a moment, and Conko, looking for an opening to get in his hypnotic eye-

work, let Hitch chase him all around the ring a dozen times.

There were three minutes of this screaming farce, and when it ended, Hitch Diamond was reeling and staggering from his wild chase around the ring, and his legs were cramping under him and felt like lead.

Without knowing it, Hitch had spun around like a top for three minutes, and a natural dizziness was upon him, and before his bewildered eyes the crowd of faces sagged and swayed, disappeared and reappeared.

Again and again he had struck at Conko and missed. When the round had ended, Hitch found himself swinging on to Mukes with all his weight to keep from falling to the floor, while Conko's bellowing was like the distant thunder of the surf in his ear, sounding afar off:

"Sleep! Sleep! Sleep, Hitch Diamond, go to sleep!"

When Conko Mukes walked to his corner he was jubilant. He faced the crowd of wondering coons, placed his gloved hands to the side of his face, and crowed like a rooster.

"I got him goin', niggers!" he squalled. "He's wabbly on his foots! One mo' roundance, an' dat big fat stiff will go to sleep an' never wake up no mo'!"

He sank down upon his camp-stool, and his heaving chest and abdomen sucked in the air in great, hungry gulps.

Skeeter Butts worked like an engine, cackling

his delight at his hero's wonderful pugilistic ruse.

"You got him skeart, Conko," Skeeter squawked in a voice hoarse with excitement. "One mo' roun' wid dat hypnertize-eye, an' dat'll be his finish. Don't let him bat yo' hoodoo-eyes out!"

At the beginning of the fourth round Conko Mukes proceeded to steal some of Professor Dodo Zodono's thunder.

"Feller cit'zens," he howled, "I's gwine gib you a little demerstration of my powers.

"In dis nex' roun', you'll see wonders whut no man cain't account fer! You-all will hear noises whut defy all de laws of soundance! You gwine behold appearances whut fly in de face of scrutination! Us is gwine demerstrate effecks whut ain't got no resomble cause—all free-fer-nothin'!"

He sat down with a happy grin on his horrible face, and Hitch Diamond stood up to proclaim:

"I ain't never fit in de ring wid no lunatic befo'. I ain't gwine waste no time gittin' done wid dis fight, neither. While Conko Mukes is pullin' all dem stunts he's braggin' 'bout, I's gwine knock de stuffin' outen his black hide!"

The two men advanced to the center of the ring, circled slowly around while Conko began his monotonous, bellowing chant:

"Sleep! Sleep! Sleep, Hitch Diamond—sleep!"

Still keeping well out of reach of Hitch's punch, Conko waved his right hand slowly in front of his opponent's face, as if he were stroking invisible

fur with his glove. Hitch followed him slowly, waiting for a chance to land a knock-out blow.

Then upon Hitch Diamond's slow mind there slowly dawned the meaning of all this.

He had witnessed the hypnotic exhibition before the drug-store earlier in the day, and recognized portions of the speech which Conko had recited, and noticed a similarity between Conko's gestures and the actions of Professor Dodo Zodono.

Then Hitch's dull eyes began to glow with strange interior fires.

With the negro's knack for imitation, Hitch's gloved hands dropped, his giant arms dangled at his sides, and he began to move toward Conko Mukes with stiff legs, as if someone had him by the shoulders leading him forward, as if the hinge joints of his hips were rusty, and hurt him when he walked.

The crowd gasped and uttered awe-stricken exclamations.

Slowly Hitch advanced until he was well within reach of Conko Mukes's protruding jaw.

Then the sleepy lion suddenly thrust out a raging paw—there was the sharp snap of leather against human bone—an electric globe burst in Conko Mukes's puny brain, and darkness enveloped the great originator of the pugilistic hoodoo-eyes!

"I knows whut I done to dat big stiff!" Hitch grinned as he turned to walk back to his corner.

Then a loud shout arose from the crowd and Hitch whirled and looked behind him.

In spite of that terrific blow, Conko Mukes was on his feet again!

The ropes around the rudely constructed ring had been under such a strain during the fight that when Conko Mukes reeled back against them they broke, and the inert body of the pugilist rolled into the ice-cold waters of Dorfoche Lake!

At the moment, when Conko rose and stood waist-deep in the water of the little lake, he heard a woman's voice, screaming like a swamp panther:

"Run, niggers, run! De white folks is comin'!"

Conko looked up and beheld a hundred white men following close behind Goldie Diamond, as the girl ran toward them like a yellow streak, proclaiming with a Gabriel-trumpet tone:

"Run, niggers, run! De white folks is comin'!"

For one tense moment the crowd of blacks huddled together like quails bunch before a windstorm. Then, with one voice, a squall of fear split the sky, and the mob whirled like Dervishes and bumped into each other like blind bugs in a tin can.

After that, with one accord, they went into the woods, leaping stumps and logs, tearing their garments to shreds upon the snags and vines, falling and rising again, miring themselves in the muck of the swamp, howling like a wolf-pack, their voices echoing through the forest with terrifying reverberations.

Conko Mukes dived back into the lake, swam

across it, and hid in the deep marsh-grass on the other side until after dark.

The next morning, Sheriff John Flournoy met Skeeter Butts and inquired:

"Skeeter, what made you niggers run off yesterday when we came out to see the fight?"

"Dunno, Marse John," Skeeter grinned. "You know how niggers is. We figgered mebbe you white folks didn't favor prize-fights."

"That's what I don't understand," Flournoy replied. "Goldie Diamond came running to town and told us the niggers were having a prize-fight, and when we went out to see it, she raised a whoop and scared all the niggers away."

"Yes, suh," Skeeter grinned. "Dat's whut she done."

"Why did she do it?" Flournoy persisted.

"Well, suh, I s'pose Goldie thought Hitch wus gwine git knocked out. Anyways, I's powerful glad it happened, Marse John. Ef dat hadn't come to pass, Skeeter Butts would be bankbust by dis time in de mawnin'."

Flournoy turned away by no means satisfied, but confident that there was some nigger secret in the matter which the darkies would never reveal.

Skeeter left him and hastened down to the Hen-Scratch saloon where he found Hitch Diamond and Conko Mukes waiting for him.

The two pugilists and their seconds had spent nearly all night straightening out their finances

after the bets had been declared off, and the fight had run off.

Conko Mukes had been drinking heavily and was in a bad humor.

"I got jes' one thing ag'in' you, Hitch," he growled, "an' dat is dat las' punch you gib me on de jaw. You acked like you wus hypnertized, an' I wusn't lookin' fer no punch. I don't think dat wus plum' fair."

"Dat shore wus a jolter, Conko," Hitch grinned. "Lawd, I'll remember dat after I'm done dead!"

Conko Mukes's eyes glowed with evil intent as he listened to Hitch's delighted chuckles. Finally Conko said:

"But I fooled you 'bout dat hypnertize, Hitch. You thought it wus my eyes, an' I didn't hyp you wid my eyes."

"Dat's a fack," Hitch chuckled. "Whut did you aim to use on me?"

"I hypnertized you wid my wavin' hand, like dis—" Conko explained as he rose to his feet to illustrate. His right hand began a slow chopping motion in front of Hitch's face, and he continued: "You gotter git up real close and wave slow—slow —slow——"

Suddenly Conko's fist shot out with a blow like a trip-hammer.

The punch would have broken his jaw—only the jaw was not there.

Hitch ducked with lightning quickness and rose to his feet ready for business.

Conko sprang toward the door, but tripped over

Hitch's extended foot, and fell on his head with a jar which shook two bottles off the shelf behind the bar.

Hitch stooped and raised Conko to his feet, backed him to the far end of the saloon away from the door, and shoved him against the wall with such force that a picture of Abraham "Lincum" was dislodged from its nail and fell clattering to the floor.

"Ef you wasn't drunk, I'd kill you!" Hitch bawled, while Conko stood looking around him like a man in a dream. "As 'tis, I's only gwine put yo' hoodoo eyes on de bum!"

The job was quickly, neatly done—two slight taps on each side of Conko's nose.

"Now git!" Hitch commanded, pointing toward the door.

Conko Mukes did not linger. When the swinging doors of the Hen-Scratch saloon closed behind him, Hitch and Skeeter walked out to the street.

Far down the road a streak of flying dust marked the route Conko had chosen as he left Tickfall forever.

The Art of Enticing Labor.

"WHAT are you doing here, nigger?"

Colonel Tom Gaitskill's voice cracked like a whip beside the ear of Pap Curtain.

Pap had three baseballs in his hand for which he had paid a nickel, and which he intended to throw at a row of nigger babies about forty feet away. The tall baboon-faced negro, with shifty eyes, furtive manner, and lips that sneered, started like a frightened animal. The balls dropped from his nerveless hands and he turned away.

"Fer Gawd's sake, Marse Tom," he chattered, speaking under a visible strain, his eyeballs nearly popping out of his head. "I shore didn't soupspicion dat you wus snoopin' aroun' here nowheres."

Gaitskill's face grew red with annoyance. The veins in his neck swelled and his eyes snapped.

"Where are all those other coons?" he demanded. "Did they run off too?"

"Yes, suh; dey said dar wus plenty time to pick dat cotton an' de trouts wus bitin' fine down in de bayou, so dey all hauled off and went fishin'. Dey sont me to town fer some mo' fishin' lines, an' I jes' stopped here a minute to throw at dem rag dolls——"

"I'm going out there and beat some sense into those niggers with a black-snake whip," Gaitskill told him in a dangerously cool voice. "If you don't want some of it you'd better stay away, understand? And if you ever put your foot in my cotton-field again I'll break your dashed neck! Hear me?"

Pap Curtain stepped back and his voice became a pleading whine. He glanced behind him to assure himself that the road was clear for flight, and began:

"Don't do dat, Marse Tom. You know how niggers is. Eve'y day is restin' time an' Sunday fer a nigger ; an' when de trouts is bitin' a nigger jes' nachelly cain't wuck. It's ag'in nature——"

"Aw, shut up!" Gaitskill snarled in a savage tone. "If a rain should come it would beat every bit of my cotton off the stalks and bury it in the mud, and you know it——"

"I tell you whut I'll do, boss," Pap interrupted. "You know I is always done jes' whut you tole me—because why? You is a powerful good white man, an' I ain't nothin' but a poor igernunt nigger. Yes, suh, dat's right.

"Now, ef you says de word, I'll hike back to de Niggerheel an' tell dem niggers dat deir lives ain't fitten to last no time onless dey draps dem fish-poles an' drags dem cotton-sacks down de row like de debbil wus bossin' de job. Dar's fawty of 'em, Marse Tom—fawty, wuthless, no-'count, good-fer-nothin' coons done laid down deir wuck an' gone fishin'—dat's whut dey done——"

Pap stopped. Keenly watching the tense lips and the white, angry face of Gaitskill, he saw that no nigger talk would placate the owner of the Niggerheel. He stood shuffling his feet in the dirt for a full minute before Gaitskill spoke.

"Now, Pap, I want you to get this: I have trouble every year to get hands to pick my cotton. The worthless niggers loaf on the banks of the bayou until winter catches them with nothing to eat, nothing to wear, and not a dollar. Then the white folks in Tickfall have to support them."

"Yes, suh, dat's a shore, certain fack——"

"Shut up, you crazy buck!" Gaitskill snarled. "When I talk—you listen. You are the worst idler and loafer in this town, and I tell you right now that you had better leave this town. Hear me? Pack up your rags right now and leave Tickfall, and don't ever come back again. If you do I'll have you arrested for vagrancy. Hurry now! Get out before night!"

"Oh, Lawdy, Marse Tom, I been livin' in dis here town fer sixty year—I's dug all de water-wells fer de livin' an' all de graves fer de dead—you an' me is always got along peaceable 'thout no hard feelin'——"

"Go on off!" Gaitskill commanded in hoarse tones. "Hike!"

Gaitskill turned away, walked rapidly up the street, and stepped into his automobile. There was an explosive sound, a cloud of white smoke hid the rear wheels for a moment, then the big

car swept into a side street, going toward the Niggerheel plantation.

"Lawdymussy!" Pap Curtain sighed, as he walked slowly down the street toward his cabin. "De kunnel done gimme my good-riddunce papers an' axed me good-by!"

Pap sat down on the rickety porch of his cabin and gazed for a long time with unseeing vision straight before him. Half an hour passed, an hour, and still he looked into the thick branches of an umbrella china-tree without seeing it.

No white man can equal the absolute absorption in thought, the intense concentration of attention and interest which a negro displays when he comes face to face with a crisis in his career. And no white man can foretell a negro's mental conclusions in that hour of stress and need.

Pap did not want to leave Tickfall, yet he knew he had to go. Marse Tom's word was law just as much so as if the big, red-brick court-house had suddenly formed a mouth and had spoken.

Pap rose from his chair, gave his shoulders a vigorous shake, lit a vile-smelling corn-cob pipe, changed the location of his chair from the porch to the shade of the chinaberry tree, and began to talk aloud to himself:

"Dat white man shore knifed me right under de fifteenth rib! Treated me jes' like I wus a houn'-dawg—'git outen dis town!' Mebbe it's all a play-like an' he didn't mean nothin'——"

But the more he thought about the manner and the speech of Colonel Gaitskill, the more the facts compelled the conviction that it was his move. Then the thought occurred to him:

"I wonder if dese here town niggers tipped Marse Tom off 'bout me? A whole passel of 'em hates me—I beats 'em gamblin', an' I beats 'em tradin', an' dey all knows dey ain't vigorous in deir mind like me——"

Pap pondered for many minutes, his thick lips pouting, his protruding eyes half closed, great drops of sweat rolling down his face. His pipe went out, the bowl became loosened and fell from the stem, but he took no notice.

"Mebbe dem niggers is wucked a buzzo on me, an' mebbe dey ain't," he declared at last. "I cain't seem to make up my remembrunce 'bout dat. But I done decided on one fack: ef ole Pap Curtain is gotter leave dis town, he's gwine gib dese here nigger bad-wishers of his'n a whole lot to remember him by!"

He rose and walked down the street to the Hen-Scratch saloon.

In the rear of the building he found Figger Bush. Walking up to him with an air of great secrecy and importance, Pap inquired:

"Figger, is you de proud persesser of a silber dollar?"

"Sho' is!" Figger grinned. "I gwine keep on persessin' it, too!"

"I sells tips!" Pap announced, taking a chair beside Figger. "One dollar per tip per each!"

"It muss be wuth somepin' ef it comes dat high!" Figger exclaimed with popping eyeballs.

"Yes, suh; Marse Tom Gaitskill gimme de word dis mawnin', an' tole me I could pass it on to a choosen few—ef dey had a dollar!"

Figger Bush puffed nervously at his cigarette and waited anxiously. Colonel Tom Gaitskill's name was one to conjure with, and Figger knew that Curtain had been working on the Niggerheel plantation.

"Whut's de tip about, Pap?" Figger asked eagerly, fumbling with the lonesome silver dollar in his pocket.

"Dat would be tellin'," Pap grinned, as he leaned back and watched a tiny tree-spider floating in the breeze on the end of its web.

Figger puffed unconsciously on his cigarette until it burned down to his lips and scorched them; he snatched it out of his mouth and blistered his fingers; he slapped his foot upon it as it lay on the ground, then sprang up with an exclamation and nursed a bare spot on the side of his sockless foot where the stub had burned him through a hole in his shoe.

"Good gosh, set down!" Pap Curtain howled as he watched Figger's gyrations. "You gib me de fidgets cuttin' up dat way!"

Figger sank back in his seat, and Pap again directed his attention to the operations of the little spider, and waited.

"Cain't you gimme no hint about de tip, Pap?" Figger asked at last. "I wants to git in

on somepin good, but I cain't affode to waste no money."

"Cross yo' heart an' body dat you won't tell nobody an' gimme de dollar. Den, when I tells you de secret, ef it 'tain't wuth a dollar, I'll hand you de loose change back."

"Dat sounds resomble," Figger declared, and the silver dollar changed hands.

"Now, Figger, you listen," Pap began in a mysterious tone. "Don't you tell nobody, fer Marse Tom swore me dat he didn't want nobody to know but a choosen few. Marse Tom is gwine gib a great, big, cotton-pickin' festerble out at de Niggerheel. He pays de best wages, an' he wants de bes' pickers in de parish. De tickets is one dollar, whut I collecks when I gibs de tip. All de niggers is to meet Marse Tom at de bank dis atternoon at three o'clock."

"Huh!" Figger grunted. "Dat shore sounds good to me. Plenty grub, plenty wages, a barrel of cider at de eend of de cotton-row, an' all de coons on a cotton-pickin' picnic! Keep de dollar, Pap. Me an' Marse Tom is done made a trade."

Enthusiastic over the idea, Figger sprang to his feet and started away.

"You kin succulate de repote dat somepin's doin', Figger," Pap grinned. "But don't you gib dat tip away. Marse Tom spoke me special 'bout dat, an' say he gwine bust de head open of de nigger whut told de secret!"

Pap Curtain stepped into the rear of the Hen-Scratch saloon, invested a part of Figger's dollar

in a long, strong Perique stogy, and came out again. He sat for half an hour humming to himself, chewing the end of the stogy, smoking slowly, leisurely, and with profound meditation.

He was giving Figger time to circulate the report. He knew that the grape-vine telephone was already at work, and that the news of a big profitable deal would trickle and ooze into every negro cabin in all the negro settlements of Tickfall.

Prince Total was the first darky to make his appearance.

"Whar's yo' silber dollar, Prince?" Pap exclaimed with a broad grin before Prince had time to state his business. "No busted niggers needn't apply—tickets is one dollar—Marse Tom's own price."

"Whut is dis doin's?" Prince inquired. "Is Marse Tom gittin' up a nigger excussion?"

"Dat's de very game!" Pap snickered. "One dollar per each ticket. Marse Tom leaves me to pick de winners. Plenty brass-band music, plenty ice-water on de way; dancin' on de deck eve'y night—all de real good arrangements whut niggers likes. You-all knows how Marse Tom fixes things up. Cross yo' heart an' body dat you won't tell an' gimme one round silber dollar fer de tip!"

Prince crossed Pap's palm with silver and listened to his instructions:

"Go see Marse Tom at de bank at three o'clock dis atternoon!"

"Excussion!" Prince panted. "My, dat's a shore 'nough word to ketch a nigger by de year.

Gib 'em somewhar to trabbel an' a crowd to go wid—Lawd, dat's real good luck! I's gwine out an' succulate dem repote!"

By high noon Pap Curtain's pockets were weighted with silver and he had revealed the magical tip to over one hundred negroes.

"Dis here is suttinly a good joke," he snickered; "but ef I keeps it up too long I's skeart I'll laugh myself to death. I got a hunch dat I better mosey along todes de depot. Marse Tom done advise me to leave dis town."

When the slow accommodation train pulled into the depot, Pap Curtain boarded it from the side farthest from the station, took an obscure seat in the negro coach, and did his best to attract no attention as the train conveyed him away from Tickfall.

Only one negro saw him go.

At three o'clock one of the clerks closed the big glass doors of the Tickfall National Bank and went back to his desk.

Ten minutes later there was a loud knock upon the glass door, and the clerk looked up. What he saw caused him to spring from his stool, overturning it with a loud clatter upon the marble floor, and go running down the corridor to the president's office.

"Come out here quick, Colonel!" the clerk exclaimed, his hair standing on end and cold sweat dampening his forehead. "God only knows what has got into the heads of our negro depositors!

Every nigger buck in Tickfall is lined up in front of the bank, and the leader is knocking on the door, trying to get in!"

Gaitskill jerked open a drawer, slipped a heavy revolver in his side coat pocket, and stepped toward the front.

Figger Bush's shoe-brush mustache was pressed close to the glass, his hands were cupped around his eyes, and he was peering in to catch the first glimpse of Marse Tom as he came out of his office.

"Here he am, niggers!" he bawled as the colonel fumbled with the fastening of the door.

"Howdy, Marse Tom!" the greeting ran down the line with every variation of tone like a child playing a scale on the piano with one finger.

"Well?" Gaitskill demanded in a loud tone. "What in the name of mud is the matter now?"

"Us is all come to git in on de picnic, Marse Tom," Figger Bush announced as spokesman. "We all paid our dollar an' Pap tipped us off to come to de bank at closin' time!"

"Pap did what?" Gaitskill snapped.

"He sold us a ticket to de excussion, Marse Tom," Figger informed him. "Yes, suh, we is powerful glad you is gittin' one up—peanuts an' ice-water, an' plenty brass-band music—all us niggers favors it fine!"

"What in the devil are you talking about?" Gaitskill bawled.

"Dunno, Marse Tom," Prince Total spoke up. "Pap Curtain—he say you would tell us—it's a plum' secret."

"It certainly is!" Gaitskill howled, glaring at the negroes with eyes blood-shot and apoplectic. "It's a deep, dark, impenetrable secret! Where is that fool, Pap Curtain?"

"He went away on de dinner-time train, Marse Tom," a voice informed him. "I seed him!"

Gaitskill stood in the door of the bank in absolute ignorance of the whole business, wondering what to do. Finally he went back to Figger Bush's first statement:

"What did you say about a dollar?" he demanded.

"Us paid a dollar fer de tip, Marse Tom," Figger replied.

Gaitskill's eyes ran down the line as he counted the negroes.

"Did all you darkies give Pap Curtain a dollar?" he asked in a loud voice.

"Yes, suh!" one hundred and eighteen voices answered in a mighty chorus.

"Good Lord!" Gaitskill snorted, as he gazed into their simple faces, marveling at their credulity.

Every merchant in town had closed his store to see the fun. Nearly every white male inhabitant of Tickfall was lined up across the street. The crowd grinned its delight, and watched with breathless interest while Gaitskill fumbled with his problem in confusion and perplexity, and an ignorance which the negroes would not enlighten.

Nothing tickles a Southern white man more than to see another white man all snarled up and in a jam of negro inanities. A fly in a barrel of

molasses has about as good a chance of getting out of the mess.

"What did Pap Curtain tell you bucks?" Gaitskill bellowed.

There was a mighty clash of voices:

"He specify excussion——"

"Dancin' on de deck eve'y night——"

"Music an' free vittles——"

"Festerbul an' juberlo——"

"Picnic——"

Then a loud voice inquired in a wailing whine:

"Marse Tom, ef us don't git all dem things Pap promised us, does us git our dollars back?"

Gaitskill did not reply. Instead he took out his watch and studied it carefully.

He was thinking: the old combination freight and passenger train had left Tickfall at noon; it had traveled for three hours and twenty minutes at a speed of fifteen miles an hour. The train was not yet out of Tickfall parish. Then Gaitskill spoke:

"All you niggers listen to me: Go down to the old cotton-shed back of my house and wait until I come. Hurry, now!"

He turned, entered the bank, locked the door behind him, and strode to the telephone.

"Hello, Susie!" he said to the operator. "Gim-me the station-agent at Tonieville—quick!"

There was a nervous quiver in his strong voice, and as he waited he drummed with his fingers on the table, tapped the toe of one foot on the floor, then snatched up a paper-weight and began to grind it savagely into the blotter on a desk.

The coons had exasperated him often enough, he thought; but Pap Curtain had gone the limit. He would catch that nigger and wring his fool neck.

"Hey—hello!" he bawled through the speaking-tube. "Is that you, Bill? This is Gaitskill—Say, has No. 2 passed through Tonieville yet? Coming now? All right, listen: tell the constable to board the Jim-Crow coach on that train and haul off a nigger—a yellow nigger with a baboon face and shifty eyes and a mouth which sneers. Yes! his name is Pap Curtain. He's got a pocketful of money. Sure! Haul him off. Tell the constable to bring him back on No. 1! Good-bye!"

Gaitskill hung up the receiver, wiped the sweat from his face, and walked out of the bank, pausing at the door long enough to inform the clerk:

"I'm going down to the cotton-shed, Frank. Got to hold an executive session with those coons!"

Pap Curtain had the negro-coach all to himself. He leaned back and sighed with a vast content.

"Dem coons tried to knife me, but I beat 'em to it!" he snickered, as the train puffed slowly along. "One hundred an' eighteen dollars is shore good wages fer a day's wuck."

He planned his expenditure of the money: first a visit to New Orleans, and a happy time in the negro resorts of that city. After that a job on a steamboat which traveled down the river. After a long time, a return to Tickfall and a renewal of friendships with his negro neighbors.

"Niggers don't hold spite long," he grinned. "An' money don't bother 'em hardly at all, whedder he makes it or loses it!"

The train stopped at Tonieville and Pap stuck his head far out of the window to see who he would know at the station.

He felt a sharp tap on his shoulder, pulled his head in, and looked behind him.

A tall white man with tobacco-stained whiskers and a deputy-sheriff's badge pinned to a strap of his suspenders spoke:

"Climb off peaceable, Pap Curtain! Colonel Tom Gaitskill wants you back at Tickfall on the next train!"

"Naw, suh, white folks," Pap protested earnestly, his intense fright making him stammer. "Marse Tom done run me outen Tickfall dis very mawnin'. He tole me ef I didn't leave town he would bust my haid open. You done cotch de wrong coon!"

"Git off!" the deputy commanded shortly, waving his stick toward the door.

The train went on and left Pap Curtain at the station in the care of the constable.

"You is shore made a miscue dis time, Mr. Sheriff," Pap declared. "Marse Tom is always b'lieved in me an' trusted me—Gawd bless his heart! You cain't make Marse Tom hear nothin' bad 'bout me—naw, suh, you couldn't bawl it inter his year wid one of dese here Gabriel trumpets. I's a good nigger—a powerful good nigger!"

The grinning constable reached out with the

end of his stick and struck it sharply against one of Pap's bulging pockets. There was a pleasant clink of much silver in response.

"Colonel Gaitskill telephoned that your pockets were full of money," the constable told him. "I'll let you pack it until we git back to Tickfall—then you can tell your Marse Tom where you happened to get it all."

Pap Curtain's legs suddenly grew weak, and he sank down upon a depot truck and became silent.

He set himself to light a Perique stogy—one of the two which he had bought from Skeeter Butts for five cents—bought with Figger Bush's money. He broke three or four matches before he got a light, and then repeatedly forgot to draw upon his cigar.

It went out again and again, and he always had trouble in relighting it. His hands trembled more and more with each successive attempt.

"Lawd!" he sighed to himself. "Dey shore got me now!"

The niggers had trusted him, and he had buncoed them all. The place where his foot had slipped was when he told them to go the bank to see Marse Tom.

"White folks always gits nigger bizzness in a jam," he thought tearfully. "Dem niggers wus suckers, but lawdymussy, I wus shore one big whopper of a fool!"

The sweat stood in chill beads on his face. He knew what the inside of the penitentiary looked like—he had served a brief term in prison. He

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

"Colonel Gaitskill telephoned me that your pockets were full of money."

had tried to make friends with the "nigger-dogs" —bloodhounds—but it could not be done. He had tried to escape; that, also, was a failure.

"Lawd!" he mourned. "Dey got me dis time!"

The north-bound express whistled for the station. The agent ran out, flagged it, and the deputy helped Pap climb on. Pap had suddenly become an old and feeble man, broken, hopeless, forsaken, shamed, dreading above everything his return trip to Tickfall.

The deputy led him to a seat in the smoking car and offered him a cigar. Pap gazed at him as if he did not understand, then took the cigar and looked at it as if he did not know what it was. All the light had gone out of his eyes, and his face looked like a scarred and wrinkled shell.

Detraining at Tickfall, the deputy waited for Pap to get ahead of him. Pap, noticing his gesture, muttered in a far-away voice, as in a dream:

"Comin', white folks! I's right at yo' hip!"

When Gaitskill, in response to a knock, opened the door of the Tickfall National Bank to admit them, he greeted the deputy in his strong, cordial voice, conducted the two back to his private office, and seated the sheriff and his prisoner in two comfortable chairs.

"You brought him safe back, Sheriff," Gaitskill smiled cordially, as he seated himself. "Take a cigar. Take two—here! Hold your pocket open!"

He grabbed a handful of the cigars, slipped them carefully into the deputy's pocket, and sat down again.

Pap Curtain watched them like a trapped wolf, breathing in deep, audible gasps like a man choking.

Gaitskill's face was genial and humorous, his fine eyes twinkled, and he beamed upon Pap Curtain with a smile as cordial as sunshine.

That smile sent the cold shivers up Pap's spine, and made the hair bristle and crinkle with terror on the back of his neck. He had had dealings with Marse Tom before, and he knew that Marse Tom had no patience with a crooked, tricky nigger.

"My Gawd!" Pap sighed. "Dat white man is gwine hang me shore!"

Gaitskill pulled out a heavy purse, laid two yellow-backed bills on the table in front of the constable, and said:

"There's your pay, Bob. Much obliged for bringing my nigger back. I guess you want to run around town a little before you go back."

Bob grinned his appreciation, pocketed his money, and strode out.

Gaitskill looked at Pap Curtain and broke out in a loud laugh.

Great tears rolled down Pap Curtain's face and splashed upon the hands folded in his lap, but Gaitskill took no notice.

"Now, Pap," Gaitskill grinned, "that was a great stunt you pulled off on me. What do you think I ought to do to you for it?"

"Dunno, boss," the negro quavered, leaning over and resting his teary face upon his hands.

"How many of those niggers did you get?"

"I didn't git any, Marse Tom," Pap declared, hoping to build up some sort of defense. "It wus dat fool Figger Bush an' Prince Total whut succulated de repote!"

There was a wild yell up the street and a rumble of wagon wheels.

Gaitskill sprang up and walked to the front of the bank, where he could look through the window.

Pap Curtain, trembling, horrified, followed Gaitskill because he was afraid to remain alone.

Ten wagons passed the bank, the teams going in a fast trot, each wagon containing ten or twelve squalling blacks, who waved their hands at the bank as far as they could see it.

Pap Curtain ducked behind the door and kept himself invisible—for each wagon contained a load of his victims!

"That's your work, Pap!" Gaitskill grinned, when the wagons had passed.

"Yes, suh," Pap answered in a weak, tearful, hopeless voice.

"If I had known about it when I telephoned the constable, I would not have had him bring you back, Pap. I thought you had robbed all those niggers of a dollar each."

"Yes, suh," Pap sighed, praying for more light.

Gaitskill took a ten-dollar bill out of his pocket, felt its texture with a banker's expert fingers,

then said in a voice which dripped with the sweetness of appreciation and praise:

"That trick was the real stuff, Pap! How did you ever think it up?"

Every pore of Pap's body was spouting cold sweat. His eyes burned, his throat choked, his brain reeled, his limbs trembled—he was racked, tortured with fear and anxiety—and yet this white man seemed to be talking kind words.

"Oh, Lawd," he prayed, "let a leetle sunshine in!"

"It certainly takes a coon to catch a coon!" Gaitskill laughed. "The idea of making a negro pay a dollar for the privilege of working on a cotton plantation when the white folks are begging for hands—think of it, Pap!

"One hundred and eighteen niggers gone off on a cotton-picking picnic to the Niggerheel plantation, paying a dollar each for the privilege of gathering a thousand bales of cotton, and swearing that they will stick to the job because they paid to get it! Say, nigger, you are the greatest coon in Tickfall!"

Pap Curtain straightened up; his shoulders came back with a snap; he drew a breath so deep that it seemed to suck in all the air in the bank.

"I'm certainly much obliged to you, Pap," Gaitskill said earnestly. "I take back what I said this morning. You're a good nigger. Here's ten dollars for your trouble."

Gaitskill opened the door.

Pap Curtain stepped out, holding the crinkling

bill in his hand. He reeled down the street like a drunken man, staggered across the village to Dirty-Six, and sat down on the rickety porch of his cabin.

The Gulf breeze swept across his sweat-drenched face, cooling it like a breath from the land where angels dwell.

Slowly his shattered nerves were composed; slowly his trembling limbs were stilled; slowly his twitching muscles quieted. He felt tired. He breathed deeply, like a man who had emerged from the depths of great water.

Then he filled his mouth with chewing tobacco and grinned.

"Lawd!" he chuckled. "I's powerful glad it come out de way it done."

His mind quickly reviewed each incident of this exciting day, and as he watched the sun sink below the horizon, he announced his conclusion:

"When Marse Tom tole me to leave dis town, he jes' nachelly overspoke hisse'f!"

The Cruise of the Mud Hen.

UNTHINKING people assert that negroes do not think.

Nevertheless, when Skeeter Butts, by methods peculiarly his own, became the high-proud owner of a good, cheap automobile, he permitted only three friends to ride with him,—Vinegar Atts, Hitch Diamond, and Figger Bush.

Figger was necessary because his superb voice added to the others, completed the most melodious male quartette in Louisiana. Hitch Diamond as a prize-fighter, Vinegar Atts as an ex-pugilist who had been called to preach, each possessed the physical strength of a forty-horse-power mule. Skeeter needed them to lift his automobile out of the mud and to push it through the sand.

Was not that a thoughtful selection of first-aids to the helpless?

Truly, that outfit was a fearful and wonderful thing.

When those four negroes climbed into that car and began to sing to the accompaniment of a mechanism which sounded like a saw-mill, a cotton-gin, and a boiler factory loaded upon a log-train chasing a herd of bleating billy-goats along

the public highway, the effect produced made the pious cross themselves, the ungodly "cuss," and the little children run to their mothers, whimpering with fright.

A white man might think a thousand years and never think up an arrangement like that.

Then to show that his mental incubator was still capable of hatching out little fuzzy, two-legged chicken-headed thoughts, Skeeter bought a steamboat!

"Whar is Hitch Diamond at, Kunnel?" Skeeter asked of a handsome, white-haired gentleman standing in front of the Tickfall post-office.

"He's up at my house, unloading fireworks from a dray," Colonel Gaitskill answered.

"Hitch don't go back to wuck to-day, do he?" Skeeter inquired in a shocked tone.

"Certainly not," Gaitskill smiled. "This is a national holiday. I imagine Hitch has finished that little job now. Are you folks going off to make a day of it?"

"Yes, suh, us is fixin' to cel'brate, too!" Skeeter chuckled.

"Do you know why we celebrate the Fourth of July, Skeeter?" Gaitskill asked with a smile.

Skeeter knew. He also knew that "Fighting Tom" Gaitskill stood before him, and this old soldier had not fought with the heroes of '76. He tempered his answer to a hero of the Lost Cause.

"Shore, Marse Tom!" he chuckled. "Dis is de day dat our white marsters kilt all de damyanks!"

Gaitskill laughed.

"Your answer is a credit to your tact and diplomacy, Skeeter, but it certainly upsets the records of history. Where are you going?"

"We's gwine down to de river."

"I want you and Hitch Diamond to help me with the fire-works to-night," Gaitskill said. "You get back by dark."

"Shore, Marse Tom!" Skeeter cackled. "We ain't gwine miss no free show. I'll go git Hitch an' de rest of de bunch now!"

The seven-mile road to the Mississippi River was smooth and level and was a favorite with Vinegar and Hitch, who preferred riding to climbing out to lift or push. So, one hour later, the automobile quartette stood beside a stump on the banks of that majestic stream and sang of the time "when de water's so low, de bullfrog roll up his pants jes' so, and wade acrost from sho' to sho'; while over in de channel de catfish say: 'We's gittin' plum' freckle-faced down our way.'"

Six miles up the river at the bend, a little steamboat whistle squalled at them through the still July atmosphere. The quartette promptly sat down and watched the boat's approach.

The boat was about thirty feet long and about eighteen feet wide, was built with a flat keel which made it float on the top of the water like a cigar box, and was propelled by a paddle wheel in the rear about as big as a barrel.

Some river fishermen own such boats, living in them, and peddling their fish to the negroes on

the plantations along the river. The vessel could ride the current down-stream and make six miles an hour; going up-stream, it hugged the bank, navigated the slack water, and got there as soon as it could. Three miles an hour up-stream was going some.

As the boat drew near, the quartette noticed that the machinery was protected by a rudely-built roof, and the crew consisted of one man who sat on a three-legged stool, smoked a pipe, shoveled coal, steered, and pulled the whistle-cord, and still had plenty of time to watch the scenery.

"Dat's de life fer me," Skeeter Butts exclaimed. "Up 'n' down de river, fishin' an' swimmin' an' sleepin'. Ef I owned a steamboat like dat, I'd go right back to Tickfall an' ax all my friends good-bye."

"Me, too!" Vinegar Atts rumbled. "Ef I had a boat, I'd trabbel dis river givin' religium advices to all de niggers on de river plantations. I'd preach eve'y night an' I wouldn't fergit to ax some hones' brudder to pass de hat."

"Steamboats is got some good p'ints over autermobiles," Hitch Diamond growled. "You don't got to lift 'em outen de mud or push 'em up-hill through de sand."

"Ef I had a boat," Figger Bush cackled, pulling at his little shoe-brush mustache, "I'd buy me a derby hat an' a grassaphome, an' a long-tail prancin'-albert coat, an'—an'—I'd climb up on top of it an' sing all de songs I knows."

The whistle squalled again.

"She's fixin' to make a landin'!" Skeeter exclaimed.

The boat passed them on the current, then turned and puffed along the bank through the still water opposite to where they were sitting. A black, chunky, bull-necked negro, the whites of whose eyes shone across the water like china door-knobs, hurled a rope toward them.

"Gimme a turn aroun' dat stump!" he bellowed, as he stopped the machinery.

While the quartet tied the boat the owner stepped into a little canoe and paddled ashore.

"Howdy, brudders!" he bellowed, as he sat down with them. "My name is Pipe Smash."

"Us is got names, too," Skeeter Butts proclaimed, as he introduced himself and his friends. "We been watchin' you' boat an' wishin' dat we had one."

Smash hesitated just a second before answering. An eager look flashed in his eyes and vanished. Then he said:

"'Tain't such a awful rotten dawg's life fer a nigger—livin' on you' own boat. I's jes' mournin' in my mind because I's got to quit it."

"How come?" Skeeter asked.

"I's gittin' married real soon an' de gal specify dat she don't want no home whut floats aroun'. permiscus so dat de chickens don't know whar to come to roost. She wants me to sell out an' sottle down on dry land."

"Dat's a powerful sensible notion," Skeeter Butts proclaimed, as his appraising eyes searched the steamboat. "Is you foun' a buyer yit?"

"Naw!" Pipe Smash said disgustedly. "White folks won't buy no nigger's boat, an' niggers ain't got no money."

"How financial do a nigger got to be to pick up a good, cheap, han'-me-down boat?" Skeeter asked cautiously.

"Well, suh, I figger it out dis way," Pipe Smash said, boring the middle finger of his right hand into the palm of his left hand for emphasis. "I bought dat whole boat jes' as she floats from a white man whut picked a fuss wid de cote-house an' had to run in a direction whar de river didn't go. It costed me two hundred dollars ten year ago, an' is some wore out. One hundred dollars in cash spondulix gits her now."

Skeeter glanced at the faces of his three friends and each responded with a slight nod. Skeeter made a careful advance.

"Ef I jes' knowed somepin 'bout how to run a steamboat—" he began.

"Don't none of you niggers know nothin' 'bout steam-engines?" Pipe asked, in a peculiar voice.

"Naw!" they said in a chorus.

A peculiar expression passed over Pipe's face.

Skeeter's quick eyes caught the look, and he rightly concluded that Pipe was going to take advantage of their ignorance to cheat them.

"'Tain't no trouble to learn how to run 'em," Pipe remarked. "All you got to do is to keep fire in de furnace an' water in de b'iler, an' hol' to de steerin'-wheel an' stay in de river."

"Dat sounds easy," Skeeter said, as he rose to

his feet. "Less paddle out an' take a look at dat boat."

When they were all aboard and the engine was puffing laboriously up the river, Pipe Smash looked at the four grinning negroes with an air of triumph.

He knew his steamboat was sold.

They were traveling about as fast as a lame man could walk, but there was an exhilarating throb to the engine, and a cheerful slap-slap to the paddle-wheel, and the river went past them instead of taking them with it, and by shutting their eyes for five minutes and then opening them they could see that they were actually gaining on the scenery.

And the scenery would set an artist wild: a sky like a soap-bubble, and high in the dome a buzzard sailing like a speck of dust, a river like a broad, flowing ribbon of old gold, and close to the levees on each side the woods, dense, black, moss-hung and funereal, absorbing so little of the sun's light that the negroes could hear the call of the night-owls and the voice of the whip-poor-will.

Suddenly Skeeter's high soprano voice ran out across the water, the other voices joined, and the woods echoed back the music:

"When peace like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrers like sea-billers roll—
Whutever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well, wid my soul."

"Whut is de name of dis boat called, Pipe?" Skeeter asked at the end of their song.

"'Tain't got no name," Pipe answered.

"Dat won't do," Vinegar Atts bellowed, as he looked with proprietary eye upon the vessel. "Less call her by some high-soundin' name."

"Less call her de *Skeeter Butts*?" the little barkeeper promptly suggested.

"Naw!" the three other men whooped.

Skeeter giggled.

"I figger dar will be three votes agin any yuther nigger's name in dis bunch," he said. "Less call her de *Hen-Scratch.*"

"Naw!" the trio bellowed. "A saloom ain't no fitten name fer a boat."

"Less call her de *Shoo-fly*"

"Naw!" the bunch howled. "We don't name no boat after a Mefdis meetin'-house."

Finally Skeeter said:

"I motions dat we leave it to Pipe Smash to name de boat fer us!"

"Dat's right! Gib us a good name, Pipe!"

Pipe scratched his woolly head and thought. Then he said:

"Is you niggers made acquaintance wid a coot?"

"Suttinly."

"Is you ever seed how a coot starts to fly? He leans fur back like he was restin' on his tail den he takes a runnin' shoot——"

"Shore! We knows!" the men interrupted.

"Dis boat gits its start by shovin' wid its tail," Pipe resumed. "Furthermo', dis boat, like a coot,

is a lan' an' water bird. Accawdin' to dat notion, I votes dat we call dis boat after de nigger word fer a coot——"

"De *Mud Hen*!" the quartet whooped triumphantly. "De *Mud Hen*!"

From that moment our four friends were consumed with desire to own the boat which had received such a high-sounding and appropriate name.

Skeeter presided at a lengthy consultation, then came forward to the pilot-wheel and counted one hundred dollars into Pipe Smash's greedy palm.

"Each of us chips in twenty-five dollars, Pipe," Skeeter explained.

"Dat's a fine way to do," Pipe grinned. "Is you elected who is de head boss leader yit?"

"Naw," Skeeter said. "We ain't got dat fur."

"Ef you 'vide up yo' jobs an' decide who is gwine be who, I'll learn you how to run de boat an' esplain each man's job to him," Pipe proposed. "Atter dat, I'll step off."

"I announces myse'f de captain of dis boat!" Skeeter Butts yelled. "Any objections?"

"I's de commondore," Hitch Diamond bellowed.

"I's de skipper," Figger Bush quacked.

"My job is cut out for me," Vinegar Atts grinned. "I's de fust high exalted chaplain."

"Whut do de chaplain do?" Skeeter Butts wanted to know.

"He sets down an' sings religium toons ontil somebody dies," Vinegar informed him. "Den

he gibs de dead man religium advices, ties a lump of coal to his foots, an' draps him in de ribber."

"Dat's a easy job!" Figger cackled.

"'Tain't so," Vinegar growled. "Plenty accidunts happen on boats—de b'iler busts, de boat snags out de bottom on a stump an' sinks, de boat ketches on fire an' burns up, an' niggers falls overboard an' gets drowndead."

"Shut up, Revun!" Skeeter Butts barked. "Dat kind of graveyard talk gibs me trouble in my mind."

"Prepare to git ready to die!" Vinegar bellowed dramatically. "Dis river is 'bout fawty miles deep!"

"Whut you figger on doin' as commondore, Hitch?" Skeeter asked.

"I sets in de middle of dis boat to balunce de load," the giant prize-fighter announced. "I'll watch you fiddle wid dat little steer-wheel, an' between times, mebbe I'll shovel a leetle coal."

"Whut you gwine do as skipper, Figger?" Butts inquired next.

"I skips all de hard jobs, an' all de easy wuck dat I kin," Figger snickered. "I don't mind standin' up in front an' watchin' fer snags an' allergaters. I's gwine hab a fence rail tied under each arm an' stan' straddle of a log. Ef dis boat sinks, Figger figgers on floatin' to land!"

"I's gwine lay in some fence-rails, too," Vinegar Atts declared. "I'll need a whole wood-pile of 'em."

"It'll take a whole log-raft to float me," Hitch

Diamond decided. "I'll fix it togedder as soon as I git back to land."

"Whut good will a lot of fence-rails do you niggers ef dis old engine busts?" Pipe Smash inquired in a tone of comment. "When a steamboat blows up dar ain't enough of it left over fer any fool nigger to set on."

"Dat's so," Skeeter Butts replied uneasily, trying to grin with stiffening lips. "Does dey bust up pretty frequent?"

"Naw, suh, dey never busts up but once," Pipe Smash grinned. "Once is a plum' plenty fer any kind of boat."

"I mean does pretty many boats bust up?" Skeeter explained.

"All of 'em—soon or late," Smash chuckled.

"Mebbe I hadn't oughter been so spry 'bout buyin' dis boat," Skeeter mourned, as he looked down into the muddy water and shuddered.

"I wouldn't say dat till I learnt how to run de boat," Smash responded. "Come here an' take holt of dis wheel."

Smash had shrewdly waited until the right time to give this invitation. They were now riding down the middle of the river on the current. The boat was still lacking in speed, but it moved as smoothly as a high-powered automobile.

"Huh," Skeeter chuckled. "Dis here is a snap. I feel like I been runnin' steamboats all my life. Gimme elbow room accawdin' to my muscle, niggers, an' watch Cap'n Skeeter Butts make de *Mud Hen* flit!"

Hitch Diamond, the commodore, reached for the coal shovel.

"Drap dat shovel, Hitch!" Pipe Smash grinned. "Coal costs a heap money an' you don't want to waste it goin' down-stream. De time to shovel ain't yit."

"Dat's right," Hitch agreed. "It 'pears to me like we is all got a snap. I shore feels comferble."

"I got a easy job, too!" Vinegar proclaimed. "'Tain't no real trouble to set down an' wait fer a corp'."

"All you niggers, come here!" Pipe Smash exclaimed. "I wants to press somepin' powerful heavy on yo' minds, an' ef you fergits it offen yo' minds, I tells you right now dat Revun Atts won't wait long to git a fust-rate corp'."

"Whut's dat?" Skeeter chattered.

"You see dat contraption up on dat engine whut looks like a clock?" Pipe Smash asked.

"Yes, suh!"

"Dat is called de steam-gage. Dat shows how much steam is in de b'ilers. Now dis engine won't tote but sixty pounds of steam an' be plum' safe—you see dat indicator p'ints to sixty now."

"Dat's right!" Hitch Diamond corroborated.

"Whut do us do ef we git over sixty?" Skeeter asked tremblingly.

"Ef you is puffin' up-stream, you kin risk sixty-five," Pipe Smash told him. "But atter you pass dat number—good-night!"

"Dat ain't tellin' me whut to do!" Skeeter snapped.

Smash scratched his woolly head, loosened his soiled shirt-collar by running his fingers around his fat neck, and sighed.

"I don't know whut is did wid dem succumstances," Smash declared. "I ain't never loss my good sense an' got up dat high yit. But I got it figgered out dat a real quick nigger could do two things: he kin open de furnace, rake out de hot coals, set de boat on fire an' burn her up; or, he kin jump in de river an' let de boat float ontil she busts!"

"Hear dem words!" Vinegar Atts bawled. "I knowed I had a good chance to orate over a corp'!"

Skeeter Butts looked greatly scared for a minute, then he took a big breath and rallied.

"Dat ain't so awful dangersome," he said. "I bet you niggers seben dollars per each dat dat indicator don't never reach sixty no more—open dat furnace door, Hitch, an' cool de b'iler!"

The commodore lost no time in obeying the captain.

"Dat ain't de right way to do!" Pipe Smash told them. "Ef you open de furnace door, de b'iler gits hotter—dat makes de fire draw better!"

"Shet dat furnace door, Hitch, you fool!" Skeeter barked. "My Lawd, you's gittin' us ready to bust!"

The commodore shut the door.

Then Pipe Smash gave them another jolt:

"You all is got one mo' little jigger to watch, niggers!" he said, pointing to a glass tube. "Dat little, round, glass bottle is de water-gage. You

wanter put water in de b'iler till dat water-gage stands half-full all de time. Ef dat little bottle ever goes plum' dry, de buzzards will be pickin' yo' bones outen de top of de cypress trees along dis river!"

"Hear dat, now!" Vinegar Atts whooped. "Dis here chaplain shore has cut out a hard-wuckin' job fer hisse'f!"

"Shut up, Revun!" Skeeter snapped. "You ack like you wus proud dis boat wus gwine bust."

"'Tain't so!" Vinegar protested. "I done invested my whole June sal'ry from de Shoo-fly chu'ch in dis boat!"

Skeeter's eyes lit on Figger Bush.

"Figger," he said, "you done nominate yo'se'f de skipper—you skip aroun' here an' sot yo' eye on dis glass bottle!"

"She won't dry up as long as I rides in dis boat!" Figger said with conviction. "I wouldn't take my eye offen dat bottle ef a allergater tickled me wid his tail!"

"I got a few mo' advices," Pipe Smash announced. "You wants to keep de lily-pads, snags, an' wire-grass outèn de paddle-wheel an' de steerin'-gear. Ef you don't you'll git kotch in de current an' float plum' to de Gulf of Mexico."

"Hear dem words!" Vinegar Atts whooped. "All you niggers better be on de mourners' bench a gittin' religium!"

"Shut up, Vinegar!" Skeeter wailed. "You set behime dis boat an' watch dat paddle-wheel."

"I shore will!" Vinegar declared. "An' de fust

time she fouls up you'll see Vinegar floatin' to'des de shore straddle of his own coat-tail! Dis chaplain don't take no chances wid hisse'f—I don't need no visit to de Gulf."

"I cain't remember nothin' mo' to say," Pipe Smash said, scratching his woolly head. "Mebbe I oughter say dis: Keep all de bolts screwed up real tight."

"Dat's my job!" Skeeter declared. "I don't trust dese igernunt niggers wid no monkey-wrench."

"Dat's right, Cap'n!" Pipe Smash applauded. "You keep dat monkey-wrench in yo' hand an' 'tend to dat job wid yo' eyes wide open, or you'll shore hab to paddle yo'se'f ashore wid yo' hands!"

They passed the spot on the shore where, four hours earlier, the boat had been tied to a stump.

Pipe Smash glanced up at the sun.

"I 'speck it's 'bout time I wus steppin' off an' lettin' you-alls hab yo' boat," he said. "I's gwine to de railroad track an' ketch de log-train fer Kerlerac. Dar's a big Fo'th of July nigger dance at Kerlerac to-night."

Skeeter ran the boat past the stump, gave the wheel a turn, the current swept the rear of the boat around, and Skeeter puffed up to the landing with the skill of an expert pilot.

"Well did!" Smash applauded, as he leaped into the canoe and paddled to shore with the line. "You ack like you been runnin' steamboats all yo' life!"

When the men stood once more upon the ground

they shook hands all around and were perfectly happy.

"Now, fellers," Skeeter said, "I motions dat we goes back to Tickfall in de auto, gits us a lot of grub an' fixin's, an' come right back to de boat fer a long ride."

"Ef you's plannin' to take a long ride, fellers, mebbe I could do you a las' kind favor by tightenin' up all de machinery," Pipe Smash said. "I got a little time yit."

"De Lawd bless you, my brudder!" Vinegar Atts howled. "Dat would shore be a Christyum ack."

"Be shore an' watch dat little bolt back behime de steam-gage, cullud folks," Smash grinned. "De jumpin' of de steam loosens up dat bolt mo' dan any."

"You go on an' tight her up, brudder!" Vinegar urged. "Put yo' muscle to it right!"

"Good-bye, niggers!" Pipe Smash howled. "You won't see me when you come back. I hopes you'll like de boat an' hab good luck!"

As Pipe climbed on the boat the automobile roared the departure of the happy quartet.

Two hours later the automobile party returned to the river.

They unloaded four baskets of food and four large watermelons. Figger Bush had advocated bringing a jug, but Skeeter Butts had vetoed the suggestion on the ground that it might offend the Reverend Vinegar Atts, chaplain. Skeeter knew

better than that, but he saw no reason why he should furnish the bunch with a gallon of liquor when he did not drink himself.

"How we gwine git dis truck to dat boat?" Hitch Diamond growled, looking across the water in surprise.

"How did dat Pipe Smash git to land when de little canoe is tied up agin de side of dat steamboat?" Figger Bush asked.

"He come in hand over hand on de rope," Skeeter Butts informed him. "Pipe knowed ef he tied dat canoe to de land some nigger would steal it."

"Dat's a fack," Hitch Diamond bellowed. "'Taint safe to leave nothin' aroun' whar a po' nigger kin set down an' trabbel in it."

Skeeter Butts laid hold upon the line and passed over to the boat swinging by his hands as agile as a monkey. Then he put to shore in the canoe and ferried his friends across. Afterward, he brought in the food supplies.

"We'll trabbel up de river fust, niggers," Captain Skeeter Butts announced, as he and Hitch Diamond busied themselves with the fire in the furnace. "Soon as I gits a little practice wid runnin' her, we'll turn down stream an' paddle plum' to de Gulf of Mexico."

As far as they could see, they were the only living creatures on the river. The noon sun blazed in the heavens and made the deck of the boat like a furnace; the heat reflected from the water was simply dreadful. A white man would have fallen

with heat prostration in an hour, but these children of the sun laughed and sang and shouted, and stood in the blaze of light, grinning, white-toothed, and perfectly happy.

They ate watermelon, gobbled their lunches, smoked cheap cigars, and talked like a lot of gobbling turkeys. Finally Vinegar Atts walked to the edge of the boat and looked down in the muddy swirl of the Mississippi.

"Dis water looks heap deeper to me since dat Pipe Smash went away," he contemplated. "An' I bet it's powerful wet, too!"

"You git a rockin'-chair outen de bood-war an' set down, Revun!" Captain Butts commanded. "I don't wanter hear you startin' no doubts!"

"Dar ain't nothin' in de drawin'-room but a three-leg stool," Vinegar mourned. "'Taint got nothin' to rest my back agin."

"Let her go!" Hitch Diamond, the commodore, bellowed in a voice which could be heard a mile.

Skeeter Butts laid one hand upon the wheel and with the other slightly opened the throttle.

The paddle-wheel spanked the water for three revolutions, then there was a backward jerk which loosened every negro's teeth.

Hitch Diamond fell against the furnace door on his hands and knees. Figger Bush went crashing against the fragile side of the vessel, Skeeter Butts draped himself over the pilot-wheel with a loud squall, and the stool on which Vinegar Atts sat turned over, upsetting the dignified chaplain and landing him on his back, where

he lay bellowing like a cow and waving his hands and feet toward the blue sky.

Two watermelons and four baskets of grub rolled overboard followed by Vinegar's precious stove-pipe hat, which bobbed up and down on the water like a diminutive battleship monitor.

The little boat was tugging at the end of her rope like a lassoed mustang.

"Stop her!" Hitch Diamond, the commodore, bellowed in a voice which could be heard two miles. "We fergot to untie de boat from dat stump!"

Skeeter had already stopped the engine, and the negroes lost no time in releasing the line.

Then started a pow-wow lasting an hour, about whose business it was to untie the boat. They finally made Figger Bush the goat, on the ground that his office of skipper was to skip around and do everything the others forgot. They abused him dreadfully for his neglect of duty, and Skeeter turned his back to the wheel several times while he delivered a remark which was calculated to reduce Skipper Bush's self-esteem to a minimum.

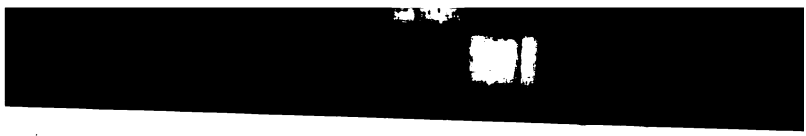
This was a very risky proceeding on the part of the pilot, especially when the boat was hugging the shore and navigating the slack water. Skeeter found it out when the bottom of the boat grated dully upon some soft substance underneath, and the boat paddled feebly, emitted a few discouraging puffs, and stopped.

Then the worm turned, with the venom of a moccasin snake.

"Dar now!" Figger Bush snarled. "Look

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

When the boat stopped.



whut you done went an' did! Run us up on a mud bank!"

Skeeter reversed the machinery, pulled the whistle-cord, puffed and snorted, sloshed the Mississippi about some, developed a thousand snort-power from his engine, but not enough horse-power to back off.

In his embarrassment he sweated enough water to raise the river and float his craft off the mud bank, if the water could have been applied at the right place.

The other three negroes took a delight in informing him in raucous tones what a sublimated donkey they thought he was.

Figger Bush developed an unusual flow of eloquence, and finally ended a superb climax by the proclamation:

"All dem unkind words whut you said I wus for not untyin' de boat—you is dem!"

Then Skeeter had an inspiration.

He handed the end of a rope to Hitch Diamond and Vinegar Atts, and remarked in an unusually sweet tone:

"You two cullud pussons please git over on de shore an' pull dis boat outen de mud!"

"Naw!" the two men howled. "We ain't gwine mess up our clothes!"

"All right!" Skeeter remarked. "I'll let de *Mud Hen* set on her nest till she hatches out a rise in de river an' floats off."

He sat down, lighted a cigarette, fanned himself with his hat, and inquired:

"Whar's dem watermellyums? I feels hongry!"

"Lawdymussy!" Vinegar Atts howled. "Whar is dem dinner-baskits an' my stove-pipe preachin' hat?"

Skeeter arose to his feet with a nonchalant air, shaded his eyes with his hand and looked far down the river. A black hat bobbed merrily upon the waves, followed by four baskets and two watermelons.

A loud wail arose from the stranded boat, the loudest wail emitted from the throat of Vinegar at the loss of his precious hat.

"O Lawd!" he mourned. "Dat's de best money-collectin' hat I ever did own. A nigger would look down in dat black, silk hat an' drap in a dollar jes' to hear it blop!"

"'Twon't be no trouble to git it back agin ef you pull us outen de mud," Skeeter suggested artfully. "We'll go on up to de bend, den turn aroun' an' chase our dinner-baskits an' yo' hat!"

"Dat's de way to do!" the commodore and chaplain readily agreed, as they climbed into the canoe. "We'll shore pull her off!"

One half hour of herculean effort on the part of the two men with the tow-line, accompanied by the steady coughing of the one-lunged steamboat, and the wailing admonitions of Skeeter and Figger, and then the boat floated free. Hitch and Vinegar climbed back on deck, fell exhausted, and lay flat on their backs looking at the blazing sky above them.

For two hours more, they paddled up the river without mishap. Skeeter Butts began to grin.

"I's ketchin' on, fellers!" he exclaimed. "I feels as scrupshus as a blue-jay wid a fresh worm!"

It would have been better for Skeeter, had he watched what was going on in the river. Just as he reached the bend, six miles above the Tickfall landing, there broke upon the still air, two loud, soul-thrilling whistles, one before them up the river, the other behind them.

If our friends had been experienced boatmen, they would have landed when they heard those two signals, tied their boat, crawled over on the far side of the levee, and engaged in earnest prayer for the safety of their craft.

Both boats had whistled for the bend.

One was the *Federal*, a government tug, which was forbidden to pass the city of New Orleans at a speed exceeding twenty miles an hour on account of the damage done to the shipping and the levees; the tug-boat was now splitting the Mississippi River wide open at forty miles an hour, and the swell of the rollers in its wake lashed the levees like the breaking of sea-billows on a rock-bound coast.

The other boat was the big river steamer *Nackitosh*, whose wash was known and cursed by river fishermen and rafters from St. Louis to the Gulf.

The two boats passed each other in the bend, and then the *Mud Hen* found herself in the middle of the river, which rocked like a storm at sea.

Skeeter Butts clung desperately to the pilot-wheel, slapping around it like a dish-rag waving in the wind; Hitch and Vinegar, who had been lying flat on their backs on deck, began to roll and scratch and claw at the deck to keep from falling overboard into the river; Figger Bush fell into the coal-pile near the furnace, scrambled like a cat in an ash-barrel, and kicked lumps of coal all over the boat.

There is nothing which can roughhouse a little boat as shamefully as two big boats; from the government tug there came a fan-shaped stern-wave four feet high, rode under the *Mud Hen*, hoisted her nearly end on end, and let her down. Then the wash from the side-wheel steamboat met the tug's stern-wave, rode over it like a petrel, and came aboard the *Mud Hen* for a friendly call on the new owners.

Four hundred barrels of nice, wet Mississippi River water sat down in the laps of the terrified Tickfall quartet and embraced them lovingly.

Then this colored quartet sang a scale of ninety or one hundred assorted yells never before introduced in any musical composition. In fact, they put their souls in their voices with such surprising effect that it introduced them to sounds from their throats which they did not know up to that time they possessed.

The *Mud Hen* turned completely around three times, tossed on the current like a match-box, stood on first one end and then the other, and pretty nearly straight down.

The experience was not dangerous, merely exciting; but the quartet did not know that, and when at last the river quieted, and they found themselves still afloat, they regarded it as a miracle wrought by the mercy of heaven.

It was five minutes before Skeeter Butts could recover his breath and crawl to the wheel. Five minutes more passed before he was able to speak a word. Then in a dry tone—the only dry thing about Skeeter —he said:

"I wus fixin' to turn aroun' at de bend, anyhow. I figger it's 'bout time we wus gittin' back to de automobile."

The hour's ride back to the Tickfall landing was free from conversation. Not even Vinegar Atts could think up anything to say. Each had bidden farewell to the world a few minutes before, and now in a sense of great deliverance, they were trying to repossess it.

As they approached the landing their courage slowly revived.

"Dem two boats sot us right behime death's door, Skeeter," Vinegar remarked in a weak voice.

"It squoze me up some in death's door," Skeeter chattered, slapping at his wet garments. "Dat expe'unce is done ruint me—I won't never be de same agin."

"I'se glad it happened," Hitch Diamond growled. "It wus a powerful good try-out fer dis boat. I don't believe nothing kin sink her now!"

"Ain't it de trufe!" Figger Bush quacked. "I

ain't never gwine be skeart on dis *Mud Hen* no mo'."

"You look at dat glass water-tube an' see is de b'iler got plenty water in it!" Skeeter barked. "Mebbe some spilt out when we wus mighty nigh upsot."

Figger skipped to the water-gage and grinned triumphantly.

"She's all right," he yelped. "Is you keepin' yo' eye on dat ole steam-gage?"

Skeeter was.

In fact, he was gazing at that steam-gage with hypnotic fascination. He swallowed a succession of Adam's apples like a string of smoked sausages before he could speak.

Skeeter knew precious little about machinery. Pipe Smash's solemn and impressive warning about the steam-gage of the *Mud Hen* had scared him. His experience on the river with the two big boats had fortunately not upset the *Mud Hen*, but it had considerably upset Skeeter's mind and his judgment. What Skeeter thought he saw that steam-gage doing is a mechanical impossibility, but his announcement had a startling effect.

"Come here, fellers, an' look at dis steam-gage!" he wailed. "Dat indicator is done gone plum' aroun' de face of dat clock five times an'—she's —gwine—aroun'—again!"

"My Gawd!" Vinegar Atts whooped. "Dis *Mud Hen* is gittin' ready to bust! Jump! Jump fer yo' lives!"

Four negroes went over the side into the middle of the river.

The *Mud Hen*, paddling busily, kept to the current and moved serenely down the river.

Then, while the four frightened negroes got the shore, frog-fashion, Pipe Smash climbed out from his hiding place in front of the engine, and laid his experienced hand upon the pilot-wheel of the *Mud Hen*.

He glanced at the steam-gage, and the indicator pointed steadily at sixty degrees of steam. Skeeter's terrified eyes had played a trick on him!

"Gosh!" Pipe Smash exclaimed with a wicked grin. "I never had no idear dat steam-gage wus gwine skeer dem coons. I had a notion dey would leave dis boat when dey got kotch in de big wash of de steamboat gwine up de river. I wus plannin' on dat."

He stooped and threw a shovelful of coal into the furnace, and chuckled aloud:

"I fergot to tell Skeeter dat de furnace of dis engine wus so little dat nobody cain't git up mo' dan sixty pounds of steam—'tain't no danger of dis engine bustin' onless de b'iler runs dry. Excusin' dat, dis here indicator cain't slip aroun' five times like Skeeter said it done—after it gits past dat biggest number on de gage, it hits a peg! I figger dat Skeeter was skeart!"

Pipe walked to the stern of the boat and shading his eyes looked up the river to the Tickfall landing. He waved his hat in the air and whooped, making more noise than his steamboat whistle.

Standing upon the shore, dripping puddles from their water-soaked garments, the Tickfall quartet heard that ironical whoop.

Broken-hearted and disconsolate, they watched their boat move serenely around the lower bend and pass out of sight in the gold and purple haze of the setting sun.

Returning to Tickfall in the automobile, the four negroes made much talk over the loss of the *Mud Hen.*

"We bought dat boat good an' hones' wid real money," Skeeter mourned. "Pipe Smash stole it from us."

"Mebbe so," Vinegar Atts growled. "But it 'pears to me like we left dat boat in de middle of de river, an' dat's jes de same as givin' it to any nigger dat's willin' to ketch holt."

"Dat's de way I felt when I left her," Figger Bush cackled. "I warn't needin' no steamboat jes' den. Skeeter said dat steam-gage wus a cuttin' up! I tuck his word fer it 'thout lookin'."

"Us, too!" Hitch and Vinegar agreed.

"Nothin' didn't ail dat steam-gage," Skeeter snapped. "Dat boat didn't bust—she never would 'a' busted. My eyes wus kinder jiggerty an' I couldn't look real good."

"You didn't talk that way on de boat," Vinegar Atts growled. "I done loss my twenty-five dollars because you didn't hab sense enough to watch yo' bizziness!"

"My hind-sight is always better'n my eye-sight," Skeeter Butts replied in piteous accents.

"I must hab got started wrong end foremost in dis worl', for I never sees nothin' till I gits past it."

"Stop blimblammin', niggers!" Commodore Hitch Diamond ordered. "Mebbe we'll git back to Tickfall in time to see de fire-works."

"Dat reminds my mind!" Skeeter Butts exclaimed. "Marse Tom Gaitskill tole us to git back from de river in time to he'p him shoot 'em off!"

The Fourth of July in Tickfall was a Gaitskill institution.

In the month of May, 1865, Tom Gaitskill returned to Tickfall in the tattered gray of a Confederate soldier—a colonel at nineteen years of age.

He cast off the past with his worn-out garments, married a beautiful girl, and started with her, hand in hand, along the paths of peace.

Two months later, on the Fourth of July, he dragged the only cannon Tickfall possessed to the top of the hill in front of his house, invited every white child and every negro piccaninny to his home to witness the celebration, and with his own hands fired one shot from the cannon for every year of independence in the United States of America.

As the years passed, the Gaitskill Fourth of July celebration grew and developed and became a social institution, until finally, when wealth flowed in upon Gaitskill in a golden stream, he made it a practice to entertain the whole population of the village on that night.

The fiftieth celebration was now in progress.

On Gaitskill's spacious lawn in front of his house, all the white people, men, women, and children, had assembled; in a large horse-lot by the side of the house, all the negroes had congregated; across the street in a large pasture was an immense accumulation of fire-works.

Fifty years had performed gracious offices for Tom Gaitskill and his wife. The beauty and nobility of honorable old age was theirs, as they stood beside the white colonial columns of their home and welcomed their guests, white and black. The two presented a picture which a man sees once in a lifetime—then remembers it forever more.

Suddenly "Old Sneezer," the venerable Tickfall cannon, boomed!

"Come on, Skeeter!" Hitch Diamond growled. "We better go over in de pasture an' he'p de white folks shoot off de works!"

"Hitch," Skeeter answered pitifully, "I feels powerful sick. It 'pears like I cain't git dat steamboat offen my mind. You an' Vinegar an' Figger go over an' he'p de white folks an' let me set an' ponder a while."

"All right!" Hitch growled. "But ef Marse Tom ketches you cuttin' out wuck, he'll kick you all over dis hoss-lot!"

Old Sneezer boomed again!

Then for two hours the population of Tickfall sat entranced.

Numberless roman candles shot their balls high in the air with a graceful curve, countless sky-rockets burst above their heads in a shower of

sparks, an artillery fire of bombs burst into stars over them, cataracts of red, white, and blue fire flowed in a tumbling stream, horses, bicycles, automobiles, and whole strings of railroad cars traveled across the pasture, while through it all sounded the boom! boom! boom! of old Sneezer, the cannon, counting the number of years of our national independence!

In the midst of this celebration, Skeeter Butts was suddenly galvanized into action by a great idea. He went racing across the street into the pasture, and drew Hitch Diamond and Figger Bush to one side.

"Listen, niggers!" he panted. "Rake off some of dese here fireworks! Marse Tom is got a heap mo' dan he needs! Swipe out a few!"

Following his own suggestion, Skeeter seized a keg of calcium powder and ran across the pasture, setting it in the corner of the fence. He was followed shortly by Hitch Diamond and Figger Bush, one bringing an unopened package of roman candles and the other a package of sky-rockets.

"Dat's plenty of dis kind of truck, fellers!" Skeeter cackled. "Go back an' rake off de bigges' cannon pop-crackers you kin find!"

From that moment Skeeter became an active assistant in the celebration, and when the old cannon boomed for the last time and the fireworks ended with a final set-piece which revealed the American Flag, twenty feet high and nearly forty feet long, the populace of Tickfall roared their hearty approbation to the skies.

Ten minutes later a procession of negroes marched down the hill from the Gaitskill home, their glorious, pipe-organ voices chanting the Battle Hymn of the Republic.

"Glory! Glory! Halleluiah!
Our God is marching on!"

At midnight the marching column of singing negroes disbanded.

"Vinegar," Skeeter said, "me an' Figger an' Hitch is decided to go to Kerlerac in de automobile an' git in on de nigger dance at dat place."

"I ain't gwine!" Vinegar answered. "'Tain't fitten fer a nigger preacher to dance. Excusin' dat, I's too fat an' de women folks step on my foots."

"You got to go!" Skeeter wailed. "You got to he'p Hitch Diamond push de auto through de sand!"

"Dat's right," Vinegar acceded. "You can't trabbel nowhere widout my muscle. I'll tag along wid you-alls!"

When they got to the automobile Vinegar found certain mysterious bundles piled up in the machine.

"Whut is dis?" he demanded.

"Fire-works!" Skeeter snickered. "We raked off a few so we could go to Kerlerac an' surprise dem niggers!"

"I's glad I's gwine!" Vinegar chuckled. "I bet us will hab plenty big doin's!"

Three hours later Skeeter stopped his machine

at the foot of the Mississippi protection levee at Kerlerac. The town was asleep. There were no electric lights and the river fog concealed the stars, making total darkness.

"Vinegar," Skeeter said, "does you still mourn de loss of dat stove-pipe preachin' hat whut you drapped in de river to-day?"

"I suttinly do!" Vinegar growled.

"Would you wish to earn another good silk hat by a little wuck?" Skeeter inquired next.

"Shorely."

"I'll make you a present of a ten-dollar silk hat, white silk linin' on de inside an' slick, shiny fur on de outside wid a red silk handkercher to slick it up wid, ef you'll take my auto back to Tickfall to-night an' meet me at de Tickfall landin' on de river to-morrow mawnin'," Skeeter Butts said.

"Whut—whut——"

"Don't ax no 'terrogations!" Skeeter snapped.

"I'll do it!" Vinegar howled.

Hitch Diamond lifted out the bundles, and Vinegar sat down at the wheel, turned the machine, and roared his farewell to the men.

Picking up the bundles, Skeeter led his friends down the levee for a short distance, stopping when he saw a black shape on the water.

Taking an electric flashlight from his pocket, Skeeter sent the glare across to the bulky object looming in the darkness.

"Look at dat!" Hitch Diamond growled. "Dar's our boat! Dat's shore de *Mud Hen*."

Skeeter reflected the light upon the water beside the boat until it rested upon a canoe.

"Pipe Smash is on dat boat now!" Figger Bush whispered. "I bet he got drunk at de nigger dance an' is sound asleep!"

"Now, fellers," Skeeter began, "you listen to me——"

Skeeter talked like a grape-juice orator for five minutes, and his audience of two listened with breathless attention.

After that Skeeter went aboard the boat, climbing the rope hand over hand, and paddled the canoe back for his bundles and his friends.

Pipe Smash lay in a drunken slumber on the deck with his head toward the warm furnace of the engine.

Skeeter untied the boat from a stump, paddled to the *Mud Hen*, climbed aboard, and let the steamboat drift slowly out into the current.

When they had floated about two miles below Kerlerac, where the heavy woods lay upon each side of the river, Skeeter crawled upon his hands and knees, and from the keg which he had stolen from Gaitskill laid a heavy trail of calcium powder all around the boat.

Hitch opened the furnace door and laid twenty-four large sky-rockets on the hot ashes, and left the door open.

Figger Bush opened a package of roman-candles, scooped up a shovel of live coals from the furnace, and laid it beside the package.

Skeeter lighted the fuses of half a dozen immense

cannon-crackers and dropped them carelessly near the sleeping form of Pipe Smash.

Then the three hid themselves where they could see without being seen.

The cannon-crackers exploded with a detonation which reverberated from the immense woods, shook every piece of wood in the fragile boat, and sounded like a little war.

Pipe Smash awoke from his deep dream of peace with a loud yelp. He sat up and rubbed his eyes, wondering what had happened.

Instantly a trail of red fire, started by Skeeter Butts, changing to blue, yellow, green, and white, spun like a flaming snake around the deck of the boat, and Pipe Smash lay back on the deck, whirling over and over like a worm on a hot griddle, whooping like a siren.

From out of the furnace door twenty-four sky-rockets roared, shot out over Pipe's head, struck the deck with a hiss changing to a loud screech, ricochetted around the boat, and burst into ten thousand stars against the puny smoke-stack and the fragile roof.

In a split second Pipe Smash was as crazy as a bug with fright.

He spun around that boat-deck like a cat in a fit, squalled and spat and screeched and scratched, rolled and tumbled, jumped to his feet and kicked, fell flat on his back, rolled over, crawled on all fours, and performed every stunt within the range of physical activity.

To his terrified vision, the *Mud Hen* was aglow

with fire, the dense woods along the river were ablaze, the water was a glowing coal-ember, and the river fog twisted and turned and folded back upon itself and became great glowing blankets of flame. Earth and sky and water were wrapped in one horrible red conflagration, while from every part of the boat the tongues of flame leaped out, licking at his cringing flesh!

Pipe Smash shrieked and went over the side.

Keeping carefully concealed, Skeeter, Hitch, and Figger seized their roman-candles, lighted them by thrusting them in the hot embers in the shovel, and peppered the water around the struggling, shrieking, diving, choking, swimming negro as far as they could see him.

Then Skeeter dropped a live coal into the keg of calcium powder, and the boat was enveloped in a red glow of smoke and fire.

Running through the deep woods on the bank of the river, Pipe Smash glanced behind him and saw his steamboat blazing to the heavens, and bade it good-by forever.

Then followed darkness and great silence while the *Mud Hen* drifted on the current.

Early that morning, as the *Mud Hen*, in the proud possession of her rightful owners, clucked noisily up to the Tickfall landing, the reverent Vinegar Atts climbed out of the automobile, stood up on the levee, belled his gorilla-like hands around his mouth, and in true orthodox, camp-meeting tones, gave the negro's universal shout of happiness and victory:

"Bless Gawd!"

Two Sorry Sons of Sorrow.

I

"ALL DE WORL' AM SAD AN' DREARY."

MUSTARD PROPHET, overseer of the Nigger-Heel plantation, sat on a box under a horse-shed in the rear of the Gaitskill store.

The gathering dusk of the October evening lent beauty to his sordid surroundings, and Mustard sweetened the scene by music. His thick lips caressed the silver mouthpiece of a cornet, and his bellows-like lungs sent forth strains which made all Tickfall listen:

"All de worl' am sad an' dreary, eb'rywhar I roam—"

Wherever music is there the negroes are gathered together. In a moment Pap Curtain entered the lot.

He was welcome because he carried a trombone.

"How come you toot sich sad toons, Mustard?" Pap inquired as he took his own musical instrument out of a dirty green bag.

"Ain't us all sons of sorrer, Pap?" Mustard demanded in an argumentative tone. "Fo' hundred bales of cotton raised on de Nigger-Heel

plantation by me—an' how much does me an' Marse Tom git fer it? Jes' perzackly nothin' an' not no more."

"De white folks is argufyin' 'bout a buy-a-bale move," Pap began.

"Huh," Mustard snorted. "Me an' Marse Tom is argufyin' 'bout a sell-a-bale move. I come to town to cornverse him 'bout dat."

Pap's trombone was ready, and the conversation ended with the lively strains of a duet, the refrain of which was: "De nigger hoes de cotton an' cawn, but de white man gits de money."

At the far end of the town a black saddle-horse emerged from the shadows of the swamp road and sailed up the sandy street with a motion as steady and rhythmical as the flight of a bird.

Balanced on the pommel of his saddle, the rider held a heavy canvas bag filled with gold and silver coins, but so easy was the gait of that superb horse that not a coin rattled. From long habit the animal stopped in front of the Tickfall bank.

The rider dismounted and walked to the door, feeling in his pocket for his keys.

Failing to find his keys, he set the bag of money on the steps and began a search of his clothes, but without success. After a moment's thought he remounted his horse and rode down the street to his store.

The closing hour was six o'clock, and as it was nearly an hour later than that, he found the store also locked. But he stopped at the home of one of his clerks and secured a key.

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He was welcome because he carried a trombone.

"How come you toot sich sad toons, Mustard?" Pap inquired as he took his own musical instrument out of a dirty green bag.

"Ain't us all sons of sorrer, Pap?" Mustard demanded in an argumentative tone. "Fo' hundred bales of cotton raised on de Nigger-Heel

"I'm is trus' de good Lawd, Marse Tom, but dat ain't git me nothin'. An' I'm jes' 'bleeged to tell you, Marse Tom, dat while I still trus' de Lawd I's lookin' to *you* fer some good clothes an' some money."

"Put not your trust in princes," Gaitskill said with solemn mockery. "Trust the Lord!"

The negro fumbled at the keys of his cornet and sighed.

Gaitskill watched him with twinkling eyes. He was the best plow hand, the best hoe hand, the best negro overseer in Louisiana, and for twenty years had been in charge of Gaitskill's famous Nigger-Heel plantation.

Simple, confiding, good-natured, trustworthy, industrious, Gaitskill was very fond of him and would do anything in reason for him. He loved to point him out to his friends as the negro whose hard work had made the Nigger-Heel one of the show-places among the plantations of the state.

"We'll talk about it to-morrow, Mustard," Gaitskill proposed. "What are you going to do to-night?"

"Hopey's lookin' fer me up to yo' house, Marse Tom," Mustard declared, all his gloom gone. "I ain't saw dat wife of mine sence all dis here war trouble come on me."

"I want you to sleep in this store to-night," Gaitskill said. "Pile up some of the empty oat-sacks in the rear of the store and make a bed."

"Yes, suh. I'll take keer of eve'ything. You knows me, Marse Tom. Gimme de key!"

Gaitskill passed over the door-key and the negro followed him through the store to his horse.

"Marse Tom," he said, as Gaitskill was mounting his horse, "'bout dis here war in Yurope; I don't see no signs of no war in Yurope. Now, I figgers it out dis way: de Yanks up Nawf is done bought up all de newspapers an' dey's skeerin' us wid all dis war-talk so dey kin run de price of cotton down an' all us pore niggers——"

"Aw, shut up!" Gaitskill said.

Mustard watched the horseman until the dust and dark swallowed him up far down the street. Then he turned back into the store with a grin:

"Dat white man ain't onsottlin' his mind 'bout no war. He owns a bank!"

Mustard locked the front door, shutting himself in, then passed through the rear door into the lot where Pap Curtain was still waiting for him.

"Pap," Mustard began, "does you know how come a nigger wucks wid his hands, while the white man figgers and counts his money?"

"Naw."

"Well, suh, hit happened this way: A nigger, a Injun, an' a white man wus playin' seben-up under de shade of a tree. De good Lawd drapped down a box of tools right close to whar dey wus settin', an' all of 'em hopped up to git whut wus comin' to 'em. De nigger wus hoggish an' he grabbed de bigges' things, an' he got a shovel, a hoe, an' a spade. De Injun, he had to hab his'n, so he grabbed de bow 'n' arrer. Dar warn't nothin' lef' fer de white man but a pen, so de white man, he figgers!"

"Yes, suh, dat's whut de good Book say. But I's heerd tell it diffunt."

"How's dat?" Mustard asked.

"De good Lawd made a nigger, a white man, an' a Injun outen good clean mud. Atter de dirt had dried real good, He fotch 'em befo' de big white jedgment seat.

"He say to de white man: 'Whut you gwine do?' De white man specify: 'I's gwine be a merchant.' Den He say to de Injun: 'Whut you gwine do?' De Injun spoke Him back: 'I'se gwine hunt and fish.'

"Den He say to de nigger: 'What you gwine do, cullud pusson?' De nigger, he claw his head an' 'spon': 'Dunno, boss. I reckin I'll jes' foller atter de boys. Mebbe dar'll be cold vittles lef' over fer me!'"

"Dat's shore a true sayin', Pap," Mustard grinned. "An' dat reminds my mind. Marse Tom didn't say nothin' 'bout me gittin' my supper nowhar."

"White folks cain't turn a dog in a meat-house or a nigger in a sto'-house an' especk him to starve to death," Pap suggested.

"An' of co'se, white folks cain't be mad ef de dog or de nigger gives a invite to his frien'," Mustard grinned. "Come in, Pap, less git somepin to eat!"

In the rear of the store they switched on an electric light, set out an empty box to serve for a table, and began a search for food. There was plenty of it, and they helped themselves and each other with extravagant liberality.

For a long time utterance was impeded by food, but at last Pap Curtain managed to articulate a query:

"Mustard, wid all dis grub in dis ration-house, how come ole Miss Mildred Gaitskill is so skinny an' Marse Tom ain't no fatter dan he wus when we fust knowed him fawty year ago?"

"Fattenin' hogs ain't in luck," Mustard told him philosophically. "When you gits all you wants to eat, look out for de butcher! Escusin' dat, white folks ain't studyin' 'bout somepin to eat. Dey studies money."

"Huh," Pap sighed, as he rubbed his stomach, then rose and walked around the store to make room for more food. "I wouldn't mind a invite to hold dis fer a *constant* job—plenty of steady sleep an' reg'lar rations."

"I's got to whar I kin still chaw, but I cain't swaller much mo'," Mustard lamented. "Less hunt somepin kinder loose an' little to eat, so it'll fill up de cracks inside us!"

The hours passed.

At last Mustard leaned back in his chair. His stomach was gorged, his head blood-flushed until his temples throbbed like drums. He kicked over the box which had served as a table, thus dumping the cans and bottles and other empty receptacles into a corner of the store and rose to his feet.

"Whar is de seegaws in dis sto'?" Pap inquired sleepily.

"I'll git 'em," Mustard said.

Selecting the largest cigars in stock, he wan-

dered sleepily back to Pap Curtain. The clock in the court-house steeple tolled the hour. Mustard counted.

"Twelve!" he exclaimed. "Here we been eatin' five hours an' to-morrer is de secont day! Git outen dis sto', Pap Curtain!"

Pap rose, and Mustard followed him to the rear door and shut him out.

Then, tossing his cigar aside, Mustard piled an armload of sacks in the corner, snapped off the electric light, and sprawled down upon his pallet, sinking instantly into a slumber like the lethargy of the gorged boa constrictor, or the inertia of the hibernating bear.

He was a sound sleeper.

II

THE LONE WOLF.

Slatey the Skull was a gentleman of leisure and perverted education; he was also a nitro-glycerin expert, making a specialty of the application of this sovereign explosive to burglar-proof safes.

He was a child of the congested cities, loving the noise and clatter of their streets, the whir of machinery, the hum and hustle of their myriad life. But tuberculosis clutched at his panting, crumbling lungs with the pitiless fingers of death, and the ravages of the disease had changed a naturally ruddy countenance into the emaciated, soapstone-

colored face which gave him the name among his fellows.

Under sentence of death, imposed, not by the law of the land which he defied, but by the law of life which defied him, he had wandered from the city to the deep woods and sparsely populated villages of the South as a wild goat leaves its fellows and crawls into some desolate mountain cave to languish and die alone.

Despairing of his own life, indifferent to the lives of others, he was a lone wolf, perilous, predaceous, as quick to strike and as deadly as a viper. His admiring fellows said of him that he could "smell money."

Slipping like a shadow from the log-train which stopped for water at Tickfall shortly after midnight, he wandered up the crooked, silent, deserted streets toward the business portion of the village.

Pausing before the door of the Gaitskill store, his thin, flexible nostrils quivered like a rabbit's nose. Flattening himself against the door like the wraith of a man, his keen eyes searched the streets, his acutely sensitive ears listened intently.

Then he turned, and with an ease like the magic of a sleight-of-hand performer, he opened the door and entered the store.

"I smell a nigger," he muttered with a curse, as the stale odor of cigar smoke racked his frail body with noiseless coughing.

Leaving the front door unlocked, he walked noiselessly down the avenue between the counters

to open the door in the rear. There he found Mustard Prophet sleeping on a pile of sacks, invisible to the eye, but easily vizualized by the trained mind of the Skull as he listened to Mustard's stertorous breathing.

"A nigger," he racked with his noiseless cough, "stuffed like a fat woman's stocking, sleeping like a stiff!"

He walked back to the little office partitioned off in the middle of the store. His frail fingers fumbled with the combination knob of the safe for a moment, then caressed its top and sides.

"Forty years old," he sighed, "and made of pot-metal. If I was not so weak, I'd turn it over and kick a hole in the bottom of it with my sore toe. As it is, I'll have to work with this soup and cough like an alligator for a week with its fumes in my lungs."

Ten minutes later the door of the safe swung crazily open, hanging upon a half-broken hinge.

The bony arm and hand of the Skull explored the contents. His fingers grasped the top of the coarse bag which Colonel Gaitskill had placed there a few hours before, and he lifted it out.

"No further seek its contents to disclose or draw its dollars from their frail abode," the Skull parodied. "The simp put it all in one sack for me and tied the top with a rawhide string."

His fingers fumbled the contents of the sack through the thick cloth.

"Gosh!" he sighed. "Gold and silver and a little dirty paper money—heavy as pig-iron—and

I'm too weak to carry an empty pill-box across the street to a homeopathic doctor."

Nevertheless, he took the bag with him as he started to leave. At the rear door, he paused at the pallet where Mustard lay sprawled out and a sardonic smile distorted his skull-like face.

"Behold the guardian of this gold!" he muttered. "Strange the South has been the fall guy for this sort of servant ever since the South began. Well, Cæsar had his Brutus, and every colonel has his coon!"

Then he stepped out into the lot and closed the door behind him.

There was the crack of a pistol, and a bullet plugged into the door-jamb.

"You missed, friend!" the Skull called tauntingly. "I had my sharp edge turned toward you!"

The night prowler in the Southern village seeking spoils is exposed to no danger by the night watchman sleeping sweetly on a soft stone step. The yeggman dreads the fox-hunters.

They leave town at sundown accompanied by friends, followed by dogs, comforted by the contents of sundry jugs. They are kept keyed up to alert wakefulness by the excitement of the chase and return only when the jugs are empty.

It was a party of fox-hunters, headed by Sheriff Flournoy, with whom Slatey the Skull had now to deal. Passing through the town on their return from the hunt they had heard the dull explosion in the store and had made an investigation. They

were now in ambush, waiting for the appearance of the safe-blower.

It was Flournoy's pistol which had roused the Skull to his danger.

But the Skull was not disturbed. Shifting his bag of money so that he carried it on his left arm as a woman carries a bundle, he slipped his automatic from his pocket.

Crouching low in the darkness and walking with the noiseless tread of a cat within ten feet of Flournoy, he passed unobserved by the sheriff out of the lot into the alley and on to the front of the store. The bullets zipped around him as he ran out of the alley toward the middle of the street, but the Skull's first shot was upward at the electric street light which went out, leaving him sheltered by almost total darkness.

Running down the alley, Flournoy fired into that circle of darkness at a venture.

The answer of the Skull's gun was instantaneous. The sheriff felt a jar which almost paralyzed his right arm. Making an investigation he uttered a low exclamation of wonder and admiration: The Skull's bullet had struck and destroyed the sheriff's weapon.

In the mean time the rest of the fox-hunters had been spreading out, trailing along the street in front of the store. In a moment half a dozen pistols began to shoot and the Skull was engaged in the battle of his life.

In the Louisiana villages promiscuous shooting upon the street at night is a fire-alarm. Roused

by such shooting, men quickly slip on their clothes, seize their own firearms, and run down the street toward the first alarm, firing into the air as they run, thus rousing the whole town.

All over Tickfall, men heard what they thought was a fire-signal from the business section of the village. Fearful of losing their stores and offices, they ran toward the fray, shouting and shooting, until Tickfall sounded like a battle with a thousand men engaged.

"The beggars are coming to town," Slatey the Skull quoted with a skinny smile. "I'll wait until the mob arrives, then slip through the crowd in the dark."

But alas, the Skull was not acquainted with Sheriff Flournoy.

Adopting the old Indian trick of lying flat on the ground, thus throwing the object he was approaching against the sky so that he could see it, the sheriff with bones like an ox and a mouth as grim and cruel as a bear-trap was slowly crawling toward the sardonic creature of skin and bones, as frail and delicate as a girl, who sat sedately beside the stolen money-bag.

Suddenly Slatey screamed like a wildcat and sprang to his feet.

Wrestling with his feeble strength, shooting wildly, biting, clawing, he struggled in the bear-like hug of the giant sheriff. Then something snapped inside the Skull's body and with a frightened "Ah!" he sank limply into the hands of his captor.

At that moment the street was filled with armed

men, white and black, looking for the conflagration. Explanations flew from lip to lip. Some one entered the Gaitskill store and turned on the lights.

Then Sheriff Flournoy entered carrying Slatey the Skull.

"Is he dead?" the crowd asked in one breath.

"I think not," the sheriff said. "I did not shoot."

"Gib him a leetle dram, Mister Johnnie," Pap Curtain spoke up.

"Go over to my office and get my flask, Pap," the sheriff commanded, as he tossed Curtain his office keys, "You'll find it on my desk."

Pap Curtain started after that flask at full speed. In the middle of the street, under the broken electric light, his foot struck a coarse canvas bag, he stumbled, fell headlong, butted a hitching post with a resounding whack and stayed right there.

Ten minutes later the crowd found him, unconscious, clutching the office keys in his cold hand.

One negro, a belated arrival, saw Pap Curtain fall.

He ran to Pap's rescue, but never arrived. His foot also struck that bag. Stooping, he picked it up, felt of its contents, recognized the familiar rattle of coins, and promptly departed, taking that bag with him lest some other person fall over it and get hurt.

The sheriff had no sooner sent Pap Curtain after a flask than several were produced and tendered. The liquor, poured down the throat of Slatey,

started a shudderlike cough and a bloody spume issued from the wounded man's mouth. Then he spoke splutteringly:

"You broke a rib and caved it through the only good lung I have, Mr. Officer. I guess you win."

"Where's the money?" Flournoy demanded.

"I—ah—" A shuddering, racking cough stopped all speech and the pitiful creature struggled as if he were never to breathe again. At last he spoke:

"I'm suffering very much. Get a doctor—"

"Where's the money?" several men asked in a chorus.

"That's for you to find out," the Skull answered, with a momentary flash of his old lawless spirit. Then weakly: "Get a doctor!"

"Where's the money?" Colonel Gaitskill asked, bending over Slatey.

"Where's the sawbones, Santa Claus?" Slatey mocked, coughing little flecks of blood off his lips.

"Get a doctor!" Gaitskill commanded sharply, glaring at the crowd.

Dr. Shuttle stepped forth, producing, with an important air, a pocket medical case containing a hypodermic needle and several vials of medicine.

Dr. Shuttle was young and very ambitious. He quickly made a hypodermic injection into the Skull's side. It eased the criminal's pain. In fact he has never suffered since. In short, he died.

"Where's the money?" the sheriff demanded again, shaking the lifeless form.

The Skull's mouth drooped open in a grotesque

imitation of a laugh. Slatey had nothing more to say.

"Thunderation!" the sheriff exclaimed in a mighty voice. "Hunt around for that money-bag. This fellow did not get away with it."

Oil lanterns were quickly procured and the crowd searched the street, the alley, the lot in the rear and the neighboring places. They discovered nothing but the limp form of Pap Curtain.

While the crowd was gathering around Curtain, from inside the store a mighty shout arose:

"Here's the other one, Flournoy!"

The crowd plunged into the store, surged to the rear and gathered in a tight circle around the prostrate form of Mustard Prophet.

He was still asleep!

III

THE SLEEPER WAKES.

A number of eager feet kicked Mustard Prophet into wakefulness.

As many willing hands assisted him to his feet. He stood among them, glaring owlishly, blinded by the light, confused by the noise, frightened by the unaccountable presence of most of the male inhabitants of Tickfall.

"'Scuse me, white folks," he began. "I shore is befuddled-up by all dis here gwines-on. Marse Tom say fer me not to let nobody in dis here sto'-house."

"Where's that money?" a voice demanded.

"Which?" Mustard asked.

"Where's that money you and the white man got?"

"I ain't got no money, white folks," Mustard declared. "You-all ax Marse Tom! An' Marse Tom say me not to let nobody in dis sto'—"

"Aw, come off!" another voice exclaimed. "You ain't been sleeping through all this racket. Tell us where the bag of money is!"

"Befo' Gawd, white folks!" Mustard replied. "I ain't got no bag of nothin'."

Then Mustard saw Colonel Gaitskill. "Bless gracious, Marse Tom!" he pleaded. "Come here and fotch me away from dese pesticatin' white gemmans. Dey examinates me 'bout money like I done sold all de Nigger-Heel cotton 'thout turnin' in de tickets—"

Colonel Gaitskill whispered to Flournoy.

"Put him in jail, John, and after the crowd disperses, we'll slip around there and talk to him."

Flournoy promptly acted upon this suggestion, and on the way picked up Pap Curtain, now restored to consciousness—Dr. Shuttle had had better luck with Pap—and incarcerated them both.

The crowd followed and watched the sheriff until he locked the two negroes behind the bars.

"Nothing more doing to-night, friends," he announced in his drawly voice. "We'll all go to bed and discuss the matter to-morrow. Good-night."

He walked down the street toward his home.

The crowd gathered in little groups, talked for a few minutes and dissolved.

Colonel Gaitskill returned to the store, issued orders to his clerks concerning the disposition of the Skull's body, and went home.

Just at daybreak Sunday morning, Gaitskill and Flournoy, after another fruitless search for the lost money, entered the jail.

They found Mustard and Pap Curtain sitting side by side, steeped in deepest gloom. Gaitskill became the spokesman:

"Where were you all last night, Mustard?"

"I wus in de sto'-house, Marse Tom. I didn't leave dat place a minute till de white folks tuck me to jail."

"What did you do after I left?"

"At de fust offstartin', I et."

"What did you eat?" Gaitskill asked, wondering what food could produce slumber as profound as Mustard seemed to have experienced.

"I et two cans of sawdines, an' a can of devilish ham, an' a hunk of cheese."

"What else?"

"I et some crackers an' some beelony sausage, an' two awanges, an' fo' bananers, an' a box of candy."

"What else?"

"Nothin' else, Marse Tom. Of co'se, I kinder nibbled aroun' a little. I foun' some raisins an' a diffunt kind of cheese whut smelt like somepin dead to me, an' some cakes wid white icin' on de top, an' a can of oystyers."

"Did you get enough to satisfy your appetite?"

"Satisfy—oh, yes, suh, I felt powerful well fed."

The sheriff broke into a loud laugh.

"No use to cackle, Mister Johnnie. I's tellin' de trufe. I shore had a plenty."

"What did you do next?" Gaitskill inquired.

"I fotch out one of dem long Perique seegaws an' lit up."

Both white men had begun to laugh. Mustard knew there was no harm coming to a negro from white men with the giggles. So he dismissed his fears and became expansive in his remarks:

"Dem Perique seegaw stogies ain't as good as dey looks, Marse Tom. No man ain't got a sucker in his mouf strong enough to make 'em draw, an' when dey does draw, no man ain't got no corn-stitution powerful enough to stan' de smoke."

"What did you do next, Mustard?"

"I laid down on dem oat-sacks an' went to sleep."

Gaitskill had known Mustard so long that he could read the negro's mind like a book. Although no question had been asked about the robbery, he was sure that Mustard had nothing to do with it. Then he began to explain to Mustard:

"Somebody robbed my store last night, Mustard."

"Lawdymussy, Marse Tom! Bad luck is shore kotch you by de forelock. I's powerful sorry to hear dem bad news."

"The man who blew open the safe was killed in a fight, but we can't find the bag of money," Gaitskill continued.

"Dar now!" Mustard declared with unction. "Mo' bad luck! It 'pears like it's jes' sorrer piled on top of sorrer in dis here grief-strucken-down worl'. I's shore sorry, Marse Tom—"

"The reason I wanted you to sleep in that store was to guard that safe."

"Hol' on dar, Marse Tom," Mustard said, coming quickly to his own defense. "You didn't say me no words 'bout dat safe. All you said wus: 'I want you to sleep in dis sto' to-night.' Ain't dat so?"

"Yes."

"Well, suh, I done it. I done it fur a fack. I done jes' whut you tole me. I sleeped in de sto'."

"That's a fact," Flournoy chuckled, imitating the negro's mode of speech: "Dat's whut he done!"

"I'se sorry, Marse Tom," Mustard said, "but I ain't to blame."

Sheriff Flournoy looked at his watch.

"Look here, Tom," he said. "If we are going to find the money, we'd better let this sorry son of sorrow skedaddle. He ain't got it."

Mustard showed that he favored the sheriff's suggestion by rising to his feet with alacrity.

"Mister Sheriff Johnnie—" Pap Curtain, who had been a silent listener, began plaintively.

"Shut up, Pap," the sheriff interrupted. "You

can come, too. I can't keep a nigger in jail for falling down and bumping his head."

The four walked out of the jail door together. At the door Mustard asked:

"Marse Tom, please, suh, dem white gemmans pestered me so stout las' night dat I couldn't git my hat an' my cawnet-hawn befo' dey tuck me to jail. Will you open de sto' so I kin git 'em?"

Consenting to this request, Gaitskill opened the door, and said:

"Go in and get them, Mustard."

A minute later, within the store, there was a loud whoop and a wailing cry:

"Oo-oo-ee! Oh, my blessid gracious goodness! He'p, Marse Tom, fer Gawd's sake!"

The two white men ran into the store and found Prophet down upon his knees, hiding the horror before him by shielding his eyes with his hands, which was the still form of Slatey the Skull outstretched upon a cooling-board in the office.

Mustard had found his hat near his pallet of oat-sacks, but his beloved cornet was on top of a desk in the office.

"Get up, Mustard," Gaitskill commanded, striking him with his foot. "This is the man who blew open the safe."

The big-hearted, giant-bodied sheriff gazed upon the criminal, then stepped over and felt the emaciated hands and arms.

"He was as frail as a girl, Tom," he said, with a note of pity in his voice. "But he fought like a snake. I simply had to crush him."

"Oh, lawdymussy, take me away from dis here terr'ble place!" Mustard bawled, kneeling before the broken office safe as before an altar.

Handing the negro his cornet, Gaitskill made him rise, and followed him to the door, where Pap Curtain stood pop-eyed and trembling.

"Marse Tom," Mustard quavered, "I's gwine leave dis land of sorrer. I ain't never comin' back no mo' escusin' you come atter me an' fotch me back."

"Me, too!" Pap Curtain piped.

The two white men watched the progress of the two negroes as they hastened down the street.

"Mustard didn't have a thing to do with it," Flournoy said.

Gaitskill nodded his assent.

IV

THE CONQUEST OF KERLERAC

"Marse Tom say I warn't to blame and Sheriff Flournoy turned me loose. But dem white gemmans whut kicked me an' blimblammed me in de sto'house las' night ain't say *nothin'*. Mebbe dey's gwine hang me yit. I dunno. I ain't gwine be aroun' handy till dey gits deir minds sottled dat they *ain't*," Mustard Prophet declared.

"Ef dey finds out dat you and me wus bofe in dat house stuffin' ourse'ves wid vittles, dey'll take a notion dat dey *am*," Pap Curtain asserted.

"I's done heerd de call of de migrashun nigger, Pap," Mustard said mournfully.

"Go wid me to my cabin an' lemme git my trombone-hawn," Pap replied. "Den I'll mosey wid you."

The two spent the day under the willows on the banks of the Dorfoche Bayou, lamenting their luck.

"Pap," Mustard said, "de good Book say dat troubles is seasoning. Pussimmons ain't good till dey's fros'-bit. But it 'pears to me like I done had my sheer of sorrer."

"Me, too," Pap agreed. "Now I argufies dat de only fitten occupation for a sorrowful man is fishin'. Less go ketch some grasshoppers and see kin we land a few trouts."

"All right," Mustard said. "But I favors fishin' to'rds de railroad bridge, because we's gwine ketch de souf-boun' freight."

Just at dark, the whistle of the freight train screeched for the Dorfoche crossing. Mustard and Pap tossed their poles into the middle of the stream and ten minutes later were aboard an empty freight car, nursing their musical instruments in their laps, bound for an unknown destination.

The fact that the side door of the car which they had caught was open would have published to an experienced traveler that that particular car was not going very far.

When Mustard and Pap woke up, they thought at first that the train had stopped.

Then peeping out cautiously, they ascertained

that the engine had sidetracked their car and gone on. Finding themselves in the middle of an immense sugar plantation, they climbed on top of the car to reconnoiter.

Their first familiar sight was a broad, muddy river.

"Dar now!" Pap exulted. "Dat's ole Massa-sap. Home's up de ribber."

"I bet dis here plantation ain't fur from some town," Mustard reasoned. "Less hoof it up de river an' see kin we find some place whut ain't so lonesome."

Picking up their musical instruments, they walked to the levee and turned upstream.

"I smells Tickfall," Mustard muttered, sniffing the air. "'Tain't no matter how fur it is, dis river goes past it."

"I hopes Tickfall ain't smellin' us," Pap declared. "I's got it proned into me dat we made a good riddunce outen dat place."

Two miles up the levee and around a bend in the river, they came to a little town squatting like a bullfrog under the protection levee, its gutters running constantly with the seepage water from the dike, its few houses clothed in river fog and standing on high foundations like stilts, the paint upon them cracking and their eaves dripping with moisture.

"Dis here town looks like a spindle-shanked crane," Mustard declared in disgust. "Dem legs under dem houses is shore fixed fer wadin'."

Then a prominent building came into view,

and Pap Curtain stopped like a man turned to stone.

"I knows dis here town," Pap declared. "Dey calls it Kerlerac."

"How fur from Tickfall?" Mustard inquired.

"Thuty mile."

"Come on, den. Less meet deir 'quaintance."

"Naw, *suh!*" Pap protested. "You see dat high buildin' over dar? Two nigger womans helt me up in front of dat Red El'phunt s'loon an' robbed me of a dollar an' fo' bits. One of 'em helt a razor at my neck, an' de yuther tuck my loose change."

"Dat don't make no diffunce," argued Mustard. "Dey ain't dar now."

"I reckin not!" Pap said positively. "I kotch 'em when dey wusn't lookin' and helt 'em by deir hair and bumped deir heads togedder! An' what you reckin dem womans done? Dey paid a white lawyer my own good money to git me in a lawsuit wid de cote-house, an' dey put me in de chain-gang fer six mont's."

"Hear dat, now!" Mustard exclaimed. "Bad luck!"

"Shore wus. But I didn't stay dar no time. I lef' dat chain-gang in fo' days. Dat's how come I ain't so glad to see dis town agin," Pap said. Then after a moment's thought, he suggested: "I tells you how to do, Mustard. You take yo' cawnet-hawn an' go out an' pick de town."

"Pick it?"

"Stop on all de cornders, play 'em a toon, den pass de hat," Pap explained. "I'll set down here

an' res' my mind till you gits a little money, an' in de nex' town we goes to I'll do de pickin'."

So Mustard walked up the levee toward the town alone.

In the Red Elephant saloon, he said to the bartender:

"Mister, dese here white genmans need wakin' up dis mawnin'. Lemme toot a toon or two?"

"Crack away, nigger."

A few experimental strains issued from the cornet, followed by a high, piercing note; then Mustard started the music of a song everywhere dear to the heart of the Mississippi River negro:

Oh, honey, when you hear dat roan mule whicker;
When you see Mr. Sun turnin' pale an' gittin' sicker
Den it's time fer to handle dis job a little quicker
Ef you wanter git a smell of de boss-man's jug of licker.
Git up an' move aroun'! Set dem han's to swingin'
Befo' de boss-man comes aroun' a dangin' an' a dingin'.
Git up an' shout aloud! Let de white folks hear you singin'—
Hey! O—Hi—O! Hear dem voices ringin'!

All the morning in various sections of the town Pap Curtain, hiding under the levee, could hear the strains of Mustard's cornet.

Just at noon, Mustard came back, walking slowly, his good-natured face burdened with grief and disappointment, his defeat and dejection

revealed even by the dragging of his ponderous feet.

"Whut ails you, Mustard?" Pap inquired solicitously.

"I'm a son of sorrer, Pap," Mustard wailed. "Nobody but de good Marster kin 'preciate what bad luck I's had."

"Whut come to pass?" Pap inquired with interest.

"At de fust offstartin' I blowed my hawn in de Red El'phant till de white folks gimme a dollar, all in nickles and dimes. Den a white man follered me out when I lef' an' tole me ef I would loant him dat money he would show me how to make it disappear.

"Of co'se, I loant it to him, an' he put it in his pocket an' said escuse him a minute, an' he went away an' I ain't seed dat white man sence dat time."

Pap Curtain gazed at Mustard with an expression of mingled pity and disgust. Mustard continued his tale of woe:

"Two white kunnels gimme fo' bits apiece to play *Dixie* fer 'em. I had dat money changed over to a paper dollar so it wouldn't roll away like de yuther dollar done. Den anodder white man come along an' say ef I gib him dat paper dollar he'd show me how to double it.

"Of co'se, I needed it doubled right quick because I wus already behine one dollar, so I loant it to him to double it. He jes' folded it over one time; den he shet one eye at me an' stuck my dollar down in his pocket."

"Didn't you ax him to give it back?" Curtain asked.

"Naw, suh, dat was a powerful brave-lookin' man an' he acted like he mought 'a' fought a saw-mill ef he wus peeved up."

"Mustard, you is a plum', nachel-bawn, stark-naked fool," Pap informed him.

"I agrees wid dem sentiments," Mustard said sorrowfully. "Lawdy, my foots shore hurts me scandalous. Lemme set down."

"Ain't you got no money a-tall?" Pap inquired peevishly.

"Naw," Mustard informed him.

"Is you had anything to eat?"

"Naw," Mustard lamented. "An' I's so hungry I could eat a houn'-dog biled in soap grease."

The two sat for a moment, looking out at the river. Then Mustard suggested:

"You go out an' try 'em a few toons, Pap. I axed eve'ybody I met ef dey knowed a nigger named you, an' dey said dey didn't."

V

TROUBLE'S TWIN.

All the afternoon Pap Curtain played trombone solos on the streets of Kerlerac while Mustard Prophet rested his feet.

About four o'clock Mustard and Pap slipped into a negro eating-house and ordered food.

"Whar you cullud pussons come from?" Smart

Durret, the negro restaurant keeper, inquired as his patrons consumed large quantities of fried catfish.

"We stays at Tickfall," Mustard answered.

"When did you-alls arrive down?"

"We come dis mawnin'," Pap responded.

At this point another occupant of the restaurant rose from a table in one corner of the room, gesticulated mysteriously and forcibly to Smart Durret and went out of a rear door into the kitchen. The mulatto proprietor followed.

"Don't ax so many questions, Smart," was the prompt advice of the little negro to the mulatto. "I wucks fer Sheriff Ulloa, an' I heard tell dis mawnin' dat somebody robbed a sto' in Tickfall an' dey's offered a hunderd-dollar reward-bill fer who done it."

Smart Durret's mud-colored eyes opened wide.

"Dat sto' was robbed Saddy night," the little negro continued. "Dem two coons come to town dis mawnin' early. Dey been takin' turns hidin' on de yuther side of de levee all day. Dem niggers is shore it."

"Is you gwine tell de sheriff, Solly?" the mulatto asked.

"Naw," Solly exclaimed in disgusted tones. "I figgers dat you an' me kin kotch 'em out alone, arrest 'em ourse'ves an' 'vide up de reward-bill even."

"Dat's de music!" Smart exclaimed, admiringly. "You keep track of 'em an' you an' me'll git togedder on it to-night."

Thus advised, Solly Saddler, amateur detective, shadowed Mustard Prophet and Pap Curtain all the afternoon and when darkness came was prepared to report their location to Smart Durret.

"Now, Solly," Smart advised, "we ain't got no permit to 'rest dese niggers accawdin' to de law. So I argufies dat de best way to do is to git in a fight wid 'em, sen' somebody fer de cornstable, an' let him tote us all to jail. Den we kin esplain to de sheriff whut we knows, an' he'll let us out because you're a frien' of his'n."

"Smart," Solly exclaimed, "when yo' mind goes off it kicks like a muzzle-loader. Dat plan'll hit de bull's-eye. But ef you ain't got no objections, I'll be de one whut goes atter de cornstable. Dem two coons looks powerful perilous to me."

"All right," Smart acquiesced reluctantly. "But don't you lose no time gittin' dat cornstable. I 'speck you better fetch de sheriff, too."

They separated to meet an hour later in the Chicken-Wing saloon, a negro resort where Mustard and Pap were loudly advertising their presence by playing duets.

The plan of the two conspirators to start trouble was simple but effective.

Solly Saddler entered the place with a bucket of red paint and a broad paint-brush. Smart Durret came in with a large bottle filled with a foamy, milk-colored liquid—soap-suds.

The two avoided each other for a time, then they got together.

"Whut's dat you got in dat bottle, Smart?" Solly inquired in a nigger-minstrel tone.

"Dis here is a new kind of cleaner fer clothes," Smart answered. "It takes all de dirt spots, grease spots, fade spots, an' paint spots offen clothes, suits, dresses, an' sich like."

"Dat stuff won't conjure loose no paint spots," Solly argued, flourishing the bucket of paint at Smart.

"I bet yer fo' bits," Smart answered promptly.

Then followed a heated discussion of the merits of the paint remover. The crowd slowly gathered around the disputants, and Solly gradually worked his way around until he stood directly in front of Mustard Prophet.

Setting the bucket of paint on the floor and stooping over it, he began to stir it with his brush while the argument waxed hotter and hotter. Then Solly arose, with the dripping paint-brush in his hand.

Then with a quick turn and flourish, he swiped the dripping paint-brush up and down the front of Mustard Prophet's clothes.

"Now, nigger Durret," Solly bawled dramatically, "lemme see you take de paint off dis cullud brudder's coat!"

Mustard reeled backward to escape the paint, a guffaw of loud laughter swept around the circle, and Solly followed Mustard, still busy plying the brush.

Mustard was a sight.

Then Mustard got busy. Solly felt a hard hand

on the back of his neck, lost his grip on the brush, and Mustard caught it.

Irresistibly, Mustard led the struggling negro back to the red paint, held him there as easily as a man can hold a wiggling fish suspended from a hook, and proceeded to paint him red, frescoing both the garments and the man within them.

Solly bawled and shrieked and struggled and bit, but Mustard did not release him until the bucket was exhausted of paint.

Solly, too, was a sight.

Then Smart Durret entered the fracas. Seizing his bottle of magic cleanser by the neck and manipulating it like a club, he struck it over the dome of Prophet's head.

But the soapy neck of the bottle was slick and slipped from Durret's hand, bounced from the armor-plated skull of Mustard Prophet like a rubber ball, and was smashed to fragments halfway across the room.

Pap Curtain, in his turn, came to the aid of his friend. Picking up the paint-bucket with a circular motion of his long arm, he brought it down upon the head of Smart Durret. The bucket did not bounce, but Durret did.

Deciding it was high time to go for the constable and the sheriff, Solly departed with expedition, deeply regretting that the State militia and the Federal army were not available in this hour of need.

But Smart and Solly had loyal friends, and in a moment Mustard and Pap stood with their backs

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

Mustard proceeded to paint him red.

to the wall, each in possession of a heavy chair, holding it like a lion-tamer to keep the crowd from rushing them.

"Don't scrouge, niggers!" Mustard bawled, as he held his chair poised for battle. "I done kilt so many coons I can't count 'em. A feather fell from a buzzard's wing an' hit me on de head when I wus little, which am a sign dat my path is crossed wid dead men. Come right on an' git your'n!"

Then for a minute Mustard and Pap were the center of a whirling wheel of legs and arms and hands and heads; holding their chairs before them they charged through the ring like two angry bears. Men doubled up before them and went down and they took a side-swipe at the rest as they passed.

They had reached the door in safety and were just about to pass through when the door was blocked by the portly form of the town constable.

The combatants came to a full stop. The battle was ended.

"Dat's dem, Mister Rogers!" Solly Saddler squealed, as he pointed out Pap and Mustard. "Dey wus peckin' on me an' Smart Durret."

"You four bucks march along in front of me," the officer announced briefly. "Go to jail."

At the jail door Mustard stopped to make a plea which was ably seconded by the others.

"Please, boss, don't put us togedder."

"Naw," Solly exclaimed earnestly. "Let me an' Smart go upstairs. Lock us away from dem terr'ble mens!"

"Go upstairs, then," Rogers said.

A minute later, Pap and Mustard stood together behind the bars.

"I done been in jail two times in two days," Mustard mourned. "Sorrer's done kotch me again."

"Me, too," Pap lamented. "Bad luck's got me by de lef' hind leg wid a downhill pull!"

"Same back at you, brudders!" a strange voice from the darkness in tragic tones. "I's Trouble's twin!"

Having no charge against the four negroes except disorderly conduct, the constable had merely separated the combatants, allowing each pair the freedom of the entire floor. Mustard and Pap had believed that they were alone upon this lower floor until the strange voice spoke.

Their hair stood up in superstitious fear, but the voice spoke again:

"Howdy, brudders!"

"Who dat talkin' to hisse'f?" Mustard asked in frightened tones. "Whar is you at? Name yo' name!"

"Dey calls me Mobile," the stranger confessed, coming forward. Then he proposed in a whisper: "Less go in one of dese little cages an' set an' talk."

"Naw," Pap replied forcibly. "De wind might blow dat iron do' shet. I likes de outside."

So, instead, the three groped their way down the corridor and sat down on the window-sill, using the grating behind them as a rest for their backs.

"My name is Mustard Prophet."

"I's Pap Curtain."

"Huh," was the surprised grunt from Mobile.

"Which?" Pap and Mustard asked in duet.

"Whar you-alls from?" Mobile asked.

"Tickfall."

There was a long silence.

"Whut dey got you in fer?" Mobile asked next.

"A nigger painted my clothes in de Chicken-Wing an' I fit him to a finish," Mustard chuckled. "Pap helped."

"Oo-ee, brudders!" Mobile exclaimed mournfully. "I bet dey gives you 'bout fo'teen years fer dat. Dis is a *mean* town to niggers! I got to dis town on Sunday mawnin', and got drunk, and got in a rookus in de Chicken-Wing, an' dey put me in jail befo' dinner-time an' tuck all my money off me—an' I had 'bout fifteen cents!"

"Dat's too bad," Mustard sighed, leaning back against the grating behind him. Then he sprang forward suddenly and exclaimed: "Looky here, Mobile! De bars on dis here winder is plum' loose!"

"Suttinly," Mobile whispered.

"How come?"

"I sawed on 'em all Sunday atternoon, an' Sunday night, an' all to-day, an' a leetle bit to-night," Mobile told him.

"You ain't figgerin' to git out, is you?" Mustard inquired innocently.

"Naw, son!" Mobile denied in tones which throbbed with disgust. "I jes' wants to let in a leetle mo' fresh air."

"Us favors mo' fresh air, too," Pap snickered.

"I done got 'em sawed loose—mighty nigh," Mobile said. "Dey's sawed plum' across on de sides an' de bottom, but dey ain't sawed on de top. You reckon us-all is got muscle enough to ketch holt dat gratin' an' bend her in or shove her out?"

"Shorely!" Mustard asserted eagerly. "I kin heft a bale of cotton an' tote it up de gang-plank of a steamboat."

The three stood up in the window with their feet resting on the sill.

They stooped and caught hold of the grating at the lower end, and leaning backward, they lifted up and in. Under that mighty strain, the iron grating attached to the masonry by four bars at the top slowly bent and left an opening underneath large enough to allow their bodies to pass through.

The three lost no time in climbing out. They had gone around to the front of the jail when Mustard stopped.

"Hol' on dar, Mobile," he muttered. "I done ferget my cawnet-hawn an' lef' it in de jail. I needs dat hawn."

"Leave it be," Mobile advised.

"I done fergot my trombone-hawn," Pap added. "Go back an' git 'em fer us, Mustard."

"Naw," Mobile protested. "I got plenty money. I'll pay you fer 'em."

"Naw," Mustard rejoined vehemently. "Marse Tom gimme dat cawnet-hawn, an' he's powerful

proud of it. He say he'd know de sound of dat cawnet in Chinee."

Their argument ended right there, for suddenly from a window in the second story of the jail two voices screeched like a calliope:

"Murder-r! He'p! Come here, eve'ybody!"

Yells and whoops and screams and wails came from Solly and Smart who realized that Mustard and Pap had escaped and who saw the reward for their capture slipping away, leaving themselves in durance.

At the first screech, Rogers, the constable, who was sitting on a near-by door-step, ran to the jail and arrived just in time to empty his pistol at the fleeing forms of the three negroes as they passed under the last electric street light, and ran onto the protection levee at the river.

Then the constable hastened back to the jail and became the recipient of some surprising misinformation from the wailing negroes in the prison. In an eager antiphony, they recited what they knew, snatching the sentences from each other's lips:

"Dem two niggers whut got away robbed de sto' at Tickfall——"

"An' kilt dat Mister Skull whut owned it——"

"De feller whut blows de cawnet-hawn done it——"

"He brag his brags dat he done kilt mo' coons dan he kin count——"

"De monkey-faced tromboner hid behind de levee all mawnin'——"

"An' de cawnet-nigger axed eve'ybody did us know de tromboner befo' de tromboner would come out——"

"Ef you ketch 'em agin, Mister Rogers, does us niggers git de reward bill?"

Mister Rogers, accompanied by the two negroes, left the jail in a trot and a few minutes later the constable pounded with his night-stick on the front door of Sheriff Ulloa's home, demanding admittance on most important business.

VI

IN THE MASSACRE SWAMP.

"We goes fo' miles up dis levee to de Massacre swamp, niggers," Mobile panted, as he ran. "Den foller de hog-path two miles to de ole Kerlerac plantation house. I knows dis country like I knows de insides of a white man's hen-coop. Trot, niggers, trot!"

When the Federal soldiers visited the State of Louisiana during the Civil War, they carried guns and ammunition, but they did their best fighting and won their greatest victories and wrought their most extensive devastation with water—muddy river water.

Invading the State, they cut the levees of the Red, Atchafalaya, and Mississippi Rivers, and then let the snows melting on the loyal northern hills pour their floods and do their destructive work.

Because of this method of warfare, Louisiana was the last State to begin to recover from the effects of the Civil War.

Her agricultural enterprises absolutely require the protection of the river levees; prostrated financially, the State had no money to rebuild when peace was declared what war had destroyed.

Mobile, followed by Pap Curtain and Mustard Prophet, was going straight to a spot which indicated after half a century one of the effects of this mode of warfare.

The Kerlerac plantation house was a three-story building erected of stone conveyed, literally, from the ends of the earth, for the building material had been brought as ballast in the sailing vessels which landed with empty bottoms at the Kerlerac plantation to receive the products of her soil.

Yearly, during and after the war, the June floods had swept across that plantation, the water standing from four to forty feet deep above every inch of its soil.

The old plantation house, surrounded by its stately lawns and shaded by its colossal evergreen oaks, was abandoned, and now after sixty years the stone ruins stood in the midst of an almost impenetrable swamp and cypress trees nearly as large around as a man's body grew in the center of the building, their branches protruding above where the roof had been.

The first gray streaks of dawn showed in the sky when Mobile led his panting and exhausted

followers between the walls of this old house and allowed them a moment's rest.

"Don't take too long to blow, brudders!" Mobile warned them, his own tongue hanging out like a hot dog's, his mouth spread wide, showing a gold front tooth. "Ef de white folks follers us, dey'll come right straight to dis here house an' start deir hunt from here. I knows 'em!"

"Whut you fetch us here fer, den?" Pap Curtain inquired indignantly.

"Us niggers is got to hab some money," Mobile informed him, "an' I knows whar a white man has hid some. Less git it, an' 'vide up, an' scoot!"

He walked through the briars and underbrush, stumbling among the fallen stones, to a certain corner; then motioning for silence, he listened.

"Dat mought be wind," he muttered uneasily. "Den again, it mought be a steamboat puffin' up de river. Den, agin, it moughtn't."

Raising a large stone, he kicked at the dirt underneath, then suddenly ceased his operations and listened.

Then in the dim light his face became ashen, turning a scar upon his cheek white, and his heart thumped like a drum. He let the rock fall back upon the treasure, and motioned to Pap and Mustard to follow, leading them four times around the walls and crisscross through the center and then back to the entrance.

"Listen, niggers!" Mobile chattered. "My Gawd, listen!"

Far across the swamp they could hear distinctly

a steady repetition of three short sounds followed by a long, lowing bellow like a bull: "*Ow, ow, ow! Oo-oo-oo-o!*"

"Whut's dat?" Mustard asked.

"*Nigger dogs!*" Mobile cried with a voice like a sob. "*Bloodhounds!*"

An uncontrollable sobbing seized the negro and his fright was pitiable. Mustard and Pap, having no experience with such dogs, looked at him uncomprehendingly.

Finally, Mobile dropped to the ground and listened. Then rising, he announced:

"A whole pack, niggers—dogs an' men! We'll never git outen dis swamp alive—dem dam' dogs 'll gnaw our bones! Come on, less see kin we make it to de Massacre Bayou!"

They started on a straight line, running side by side.

Then within a hundred yards they faced a slough as large as a lake, no one knew how deep with mud and water. Taking a long detour around this, they looked back and in two miles of running, still found themselves in plain sight of the Kerlerac plantation house.

"Dat's de las' big puddle, niggers," Mobile informed them. "Now go straight an' wade eve'ything you come to!"

The ingenuity of the Spanish inquisition devised no tortures comparable to the possibilities of pain arising from a forced flight through a Louisiana jungle.

A vine trailing the ground for hundreds of yards

in some mysterious manner wraps three times around a man's leg, trips him, and leaves him to struggle with a bond which he cannot unwrap, cannot break, and cannot cut with a sharp pocket-knife.

Wild rose vines with thorns like spear-points and barbed like a fishhook snag the garments and the skin, and, like Shylock, demand their pound of flesh. Hidden in every puddle of water, the hard, sharp cypress knees lie ambushed in the mud like bayonets to impale anything which falls upon them.

Overhead, thorn-armed vines and the drooping branches of the dreadful prickly ash hang down to retard man's progress and augument his anguish.

In every damp spot the deadly moccasin lurks; by every decayed stump and root the venomous cottonmouth guards its den; insects thrashed up by the agitation of the grass and weeds rise like an Egyptian plague and blind the eyes and fill the nostrils and choke the throat.

And through it all, mud which bogs the runner to his knees; at every twenty steps a pool of water and mire, which may be shallow enough for a sparrow to wade without wetting his feathers, or as deep as a well; and poison ivy, growing waist high, saturating man's garments with its vitriol juices, and burning the flesh as if the runner were wading in a caldron of boiling oil!

But the pursuing dog slips unhindered through the jungle, runs unmired through the mud, swims the pools of water, and stands howling under-

neath the tree where the fugitive has climbed to escape the canine's tearing teeth.

In half an hour the negroes, scratched, torn, snagged, wounded, bleeding, mud-covered, half-naked, looking more like wild beasts than men, stood on the banks of the Massacre Bayou. Forty yards behind them a pack of ravening dogs bayed a red-hot trail.

"Swim it!" Mobile panted. "Git across dis creek, fer Gawd's sake!"

They leaped into the stream and dragged their exhausted bodies up the opposite bank just as the raging dogs stopped at the water's edge on the bank they had just left.

Mobile ran to a hickory sapling as large around as his arm.

"He'p me break dis off, men," he screamed. "We got to fight 'em!"

With the strength of desperation, the three men wrenched at the sapling, snapped it off at the roots, broke it in a proper length for a club, and as quickly as possible selected and prepared two others like it.

"Look out, niggers!" Mobile howled. "Dey's gittin' ready to swim across! Kill eve'y dog as quick as his front feet touches the land on dis side. Whatever happens, git dem big, black, long-eared debbils fust!"

While he was speaking two of the bloodhounds leaped from the bank and came toward them, swerving not an inch before the threatening clubs.

Mobile stepped to the edge of the water and

stood poised to strike, his crazed eyes glaring at one of the swimming dogs, the features of his face quivering with spasms of pain and exhaustion. Then the hickory descended, and the immense dog sank under the water with a startled grunt.

Mobile and Pap both ministered to the other bloodhound which followed its mate to the bottom of the bayou.

Then the whole pack, deer-dogs, fox-hounds, hog-dogs, and mongrels, making the swamp hideous with their howls and yelps, sprang into the stream.

The three negroes ran up and down the bank of the stream, striking with weary arms, kicking with feet as heavy as lead, sobbing, praying, cursing, raving—adding their insane voices to the noise of the hounds, making pandemonium of the silent, shadowy swamp.

At last the hound-pack, wearied by swimming and unable to effect a landing, turned back to the opposite shore in defeat.

"Saved!" Mobile sobbed. "Now, niggers, trot down this here bayou till we git to de public road!"

Ten minutes later, they fell in the dust of the public highway like monstrous worms or rather like raw, skinned cattle divested of their hides and their carcasses left as food for the carrion crows.

For a few minutes they were motionless, lying like dead men; then a consciousness of approaching danger roused them to renew their flight.

Rising totteringly to their feet, they breathed deeply, and started. Then all hope died.

"From out of the high weeds on the side of the road, a deep-seamed, weather-tanned Spanish face appeared, and two fearless eyes held the gaze of the helpless negroes like a hypnotist.

"You niggers stop right there!" a quiet voice said.

It was Sheriff Ulloa, who knew the route of fugitive criminals, and had taken the precaution to guard the only outlet from the Massacre Swamp.

"Please, suh, boss, save us," the negroes sobbed in a chorus.

"All right," the sheriff said grimly. "Trot right down the center of this road and go back to the jail you got out of."

VII

"GON'ER GIT THEM NIGGERS!"

Just at noon the three negroes stumbled through the door of the jail, and like men walking in their sleep, obeyed the command of the sheriff and climbed the steps to the second story. There they fell to the floor and sank into unconsciousness.

The sheriff closed the jail door and sat down on the steps in front, where he gave himself up to most serious thought. Almost an hour later he arose, reëntered the jail, and returning to his three prisoners picked out Mobile Boone and kicked him into wakefulness.

"Get up, Mobile," he commanded. "Follow me downstairs."

Dumbly, the negro obeyed. On the ground floor the sheriff stopped and spoke:

"Mobile, what are you in here for?"

"I got drunk in de Chicken-Wing an' tried to claw a nigger's nose off."

"Were you arrested with those other two negroes?"

"Naw, suh. Dey fetch me to de calaboose on Sunday mawnin' an' dem two coons come in late Sunday night. I never seed ary one of 'em befo'."

"If I let you out will you leave town right away?"

"Bless gracious, boss," Mobile exclaimed with most obvious sincerity, "ef you lets me outen dis jail, I'll put dis town so fur behine me back dat it'll cost you ninety-seben dollars to send me a postich card."

The sheriff laughed.

"I means it, boss," Mobile assured him. "Jes gimme a shirt an' a pair of britches so I won't look like I was jes' bawned, an' I'll shore ax you good-by!"

The sheriff led the negro across to the office in the court-house, opened a closet, pawed over some old hunting clothes, and found some suitable garments for Mobile. When the negro had put them on, the sheriff handed him a silver dollar and said:

"Now, Mobile, I've let you out because the chances are those other two negroes are going to be mobbed. You are innocent and I don't want to see you strung up. You'd better hit the grit!"

Mobile did. He went down the levee at a gait which bid fair to carry him very far in a brief time —if he could keep it up.

Then the sheriff returned to the jail and sat down in the same place.

The town of Kerlerac was deserted except for the women and children. Practically every male inhabitant had joined the most exciting of all chases—the man-hunt.

The sheriff placed a cigar in his mouth, chewed it almost to the other end without lighting it, then spat it out.

"When that searching party finds their dead dogs and drinks up all their red liquor," he reasoned to himself, "and come back to town and find those coons in jail, they'll form a mob. My deputies will desert the crowd when the mob forms, but they won't join me. It's up to me to protect the coons."

The town-clock struck two.

Far down the road, Sheriff Ulloa heard the piercing yell of the fox-hunter.

"They're coming back," he muttered.

Taking a large pistol from the holster under his arm, he examined it carefully, revolving the cylinder between his thumb and finger.

A tiny chameleon was playing up and down the bark of a tree twenty feet distant.

With a motion which appeared almost careless, Ulloa made a turn of his wrist, there was a loud explosion from the gun, and the little creature spattered into fragments, leaving a dark, wet

spot against the tree which looked as if a man had spat at a hole in the bark and made a center shot.

The shot aroused the two negroes on the floor above, and the man-hunters heard it and hastened back to town.

When the party arrived in Kerlerac they quickly heard of the sheriff's capture of the fugitives, but not a man came to the sheriff to ask him about the capture. They gathered in a body in the Red Elephant saloon.

Soon one of the deputies, white-faced and panting, ran into the sheriff's presence with the news that a mob was forming on the outskirts of the town.

"I expected that," Ulloa answered quietly. "You and the other two deputies arm yourselves with rifles and hide in the tower of the court-house overlooking the front of the jail."

"What must we do?" the deputy asked tremulously. "Shoot?"

"Do your duty!" Ulloa replied shortly, "whatever you conceive it to be."

He turned and entered the jail, locking the door behind him.

"Boss," Mustard Prophet called down to him, "me an' Pap lef' our toot-hawns down-stairs. Please, suh, fotch us up de cawnet an' de trombone!"

With a grim smile the sheriff complied with the request.

"You niggers better play the *Dead March in*

Saul," he muttered grimly. "It'll be appropriate all right."

"Us ain't 'quainted wid dat toon," Pap grinned, reaching for his trombone. "But me an' Mustard kin shore fetch ragtime and religion songs."

In the meantime, in the far end of the town, sixty excited men had supplied themselves with enough rope to hang a man from a not too distant star; had armed themselves with knives and hatchets and axes, with guns and pistols; had appointed their leader, Barto Skaggs, a man of swarthy complexion, a grim mouth, surmounted by a black mustache, and intense, glowing black eyes, which pressed hard against the lids and showed a great deal of white beneath the pupil—the eyes of the wanton destroyer.

"Keep together, men!" Barto Skaggs advised. "When one man acts everybody act with him. Come on!"

With the first forward step of the mob a tall, gangling, half-wit boy, with a long neck, a step-ladder head, a long sharp nose, and a receding chin, and a loose-lipped mouth which dribbled tobacco-juice as he spoke, began to repeat like a chant:

"Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers!"

His harsh, crackly, gosling voice, uttering every word with a jerk, soon took the monotonous roll of a snaredrum. Unconsciously the men kept step to the words and the purpose expressed in the sentence was burned into the very fiber of their souls:

"Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers!"

Turning into the street which led to the jail two blocks away, the mob rounded the Confederate Circle, in the center of which was a ridiculous, stump-legged, pewter image of a man, too short in its stride for glory, but, nevertheless, erected by a grateful populace as a monument of glory to commemorate the heroes of the South.

Then Sheriff Ulloa stepped out of the jail, locked the door behind him, tossed the key as far as he could throw it into some high weeds growing at the side of the prison, and waited.

It was not necessary for the leader and spokesman to explain to the officer of the law the purpose of their visit.

Fully a block away the half-wit's strident voice, having gained in volume by the constant repetition of the phrase, conveyed the message in tones which crackled like thorns under a pot:

"Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git——"

The mob halted.

"Turn around and go back, gentlemen," the sheriff said courteously. "Start your one-man band to playing another tune, and go back!"

In the center of the street there was a rut which had been made by wagon wheels.

The mob moved slowly forward, and stopped at this rut like children toeing a mark in a spelling-match. They seemed to feel that a contest was on, and that this rut was the dead-line.

"We want them niggers, sheriff," Barto Skaggs said.

"You shall not have them," Ulloa replied quietly and forcibly. "When you kill those blacks every man of you is a murderer. I shall not be sheriff of a parish which contains sixty murderers—men of prominence—running at large!"

"Aw, come off, George!" an impatient voice exclaimed. "You've kilt a plenty of coons in your day!"

"Yes, gentlemen, I have," Ulloa answered quickly. "*I have never been slow to kill!* And I was elected sheriff of this parish *by you* for the one purpose of totally abolishing this wholesale slaughter of innocent and unoffending blacks, and for the protection of offenders from mob violence in order that the law might take its course. I shall do it."

Looking into the quiet, determined face of the officer, the mob wavered. Then the half-wit's snare-drum voice rallied them:

"Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git them niggers! Gon'er git——"

The mob took one cautious step forward. Ulloa drew his pistol from his pocket.

"That's far enough, fellow citizens," he said, and now his voice drawled like the purr of a cat and was deadly in its menace. "When you get those niggers I won't be the sheriff of this parish. I'll be dead. I don't know who'll get me, but I'll kill the first man who takes the next step forward!"

The mob packed denser, became tense, throbbed like an automobile when the power is turned on. Ulloa's eyes gazed straight into the destructive orbs of Barto Skaggs and held him like a hypnotist. Then the half-wit began:

"Gon'er git—them niggers! Gon'er git——"

A back-handed blow from Barto Skaggs's fist struck the half-wit fairly in the mouth and sent him reeling backward, disarranging for a moment the tense compact mass of men.

Then from the second-story front window of the jail, just above the sheriff's head and behind him, there came a sound which caused the sheriff's swarthy face to whiten to the eyebrows—the most unfortunate thing which could have happened to his cause:

"Oo-oh! My Gawd, my Gawd! De mobbers is comin'! De mobbers!"

Instantly the mob crouched like panthers ready to spring.

VIII

MOB AND MUSIC.

Up to the moment when their frightened screams had stirred afresh the mob's lust to kill, Mustard and Pap Curtain had been totally ignorant of what was occurring outside the jail. Wandering idly to the window to look out, they had seen what every negro dreads, whatever the reason for his incarceration—a mob.

With the first frightened cry Sheriff Ulloa knew that it would be impossible to disperse the crowd before him. The scream of the quarry only stimulates the pursuit of the wolf-pack.

For two dreadful minutes the negroes sobbed and prayed; then Mustard Prophet turned shudderingly away from the window and, going to a window on the side of the jail, knelt at the casement and wept like a child, looking up now and then with fear-crazed eyes at the silent statue of the pewter hero of the Lost Cause.

Then while the grim sheriff stood poised and ready, fronting alone the crouching crowd of eager men, the shrill note of an automobile horn was heard and an immense machine whirled around the Confederate Circle and came sailing down the street toward the jail.

One block distant it stopped—abruptly.

The white-haired, white-bearded man at the steering-wheel gazed down the street in surprise. The scene was too familiar to require explanation. Leaping from the car, he walked slowly and cautiously down the street.

Then, up in the second story of the jail, Mustard Prophet leaped to his feet sobbing, praying, shrieking in a perfect frenzy of hope and fear.

"Oh, my Lawd!" he exclaimed. "*Dar's Marse Tom!*"

Grabbing his cornet like a drowning man clutches at a straw, he placed it to his quivering lips. Loud and clear, throbbing with the eagerness of hope, the courage of despair, the strains of

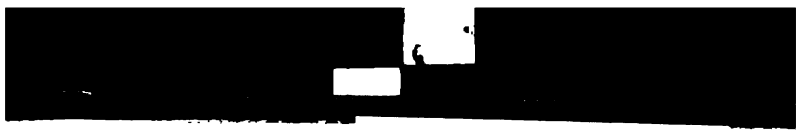
music became almost articulate speaking the words of a song:

> All de world am sad and dreary,
> Eberywhere I roam;
> Oh, darkies, how my heart grows weary,
> Far from de old folks at home!

The god Mars, who had witnessed many war-like scenes in Louisiana, never beheld an incident so grotesquely dramatic as this.

In front of the jail, grim, white-faced, desperate, determined to end his life right there, and perfectly sure that the end was near, stood Sheriff Ulloa. In the middle of the street, a mob, bloodthirsty and cruel, listening raveningly to the frightened screams of their quarry, and eager for the kill. Up the street, a man serenely observant, apparently indifferent to what was transpiring before his very eyes; while within the jail two strangling, fear-choked negroes whose breath was like the exhaust of an engine and whose hearts beat in their breasts like war-drums, sobbed and screamed and prayed and one of them played on a cornet *Old Folks at Home!*

Not since the poor, pitiful, dissipated author of that sweet folk-song stumbled over the ragged carpet in his miserable room in the Bowery, struck his head against his broken water-pitcher, bled to death upon the floor, and was carried to his grave while his friends sang his favorite song, had these words and their music been associated with so dramatic an event.



"Fer Gawd's sake, Pap!" Mustard sobbed. "Come here an' he'p me play dis toon! Don't you see Marse Tom standin' on dat cornder? Play, nigger, play! Say yo' prayers in dat hawn when you toot it!"

All up and down de whole creation
Sadly I roam,
Still longing for de old plantation
And for de old folks at home!

Up the street the white-haired man listened, then took off his hat and scratched his head in a quandary.

"A mob set to music!" he smiled to himself. "This is something new to me. I wonder what that fool Mustard Prophet is doing here?"

He walked quietly down the street and stopped in front of the jail, taking his position by the side of Sheriff Ulloa. With a graceful gesture he removed his hat and thus fronted the mob, serene, powerful, his fine face glowing like an alabaster vase with a lamp in it, the wind tossing his snow-white hair and beard—the most striking and impressive figure one beholds in a lifetime. He stood with bowed head listening to the music:

Oh, darkies, how my heart grows weary,
Far from de old folks at home!

The music ended and the intense silence was broken by a voice in the mob:

"*Aw, hell!* I move we adjourn—*back'ards!*"

With a concerted movement like a piece of oiled machinery, the mob turned and tramped up the street like a drove of mules, leaving four lengthy coils of rope, a broken hatchet, a hoe-handle, and a corncob pipe in the middle of the road.

Turning with gracious Spanish courtesy, Sheriff Ulloa bowed low before the serene, powerful presence of Gaitskill, and murmured:

"I thank you. You saved my life!"

"Nothing of the sort!" Gaitskill snorted. "A mob can't work to the tune of Suwanee River! Where's that fool who's blowing that horn?"

"I'll conduct you to him," Ulloa answered.

A minute later Gaitskill and Ulloa had secured another key to the jail, had entered, and stood in the presence of Mustard Prophet and Pap Curtain. The two negroes were too overcome to speak. Crazed by their horrible experiences, they sat wildly mumbling their prayers and uttering exclamations of thanksgiving.

"These are the men I telephoned you about," Ulloa said.

"These are not the men we want," Gaitskill replied in a disappointed tone. "One of these darkies is the overseer on my Nigger-Heel plantation."

"You asked me over the telephone if one of them was yellow?" Ulloa said, pointing to Pap Curtain.

"Pap's yellow, all right," Gaitskill smiled. "But he's not the man. He's the well-digger of Tickfall. The coon we want is a nigger named

Mobile Boone. He was seen early Sunday morning coming this way with my bag of money."

Sheriff Ulloa opened his mouth to speak; then he closed it without saying a word.

"Marse Tom," Mustard asked, "wus Mobile a yeller nigger wid a gold toof in his mouf an' a scar on his jaw?"

"Yes."

Mustard sprang to his feet with a loud laugh and gave Pap Curtain a mighty kick.

"Git up, Pap," he howled. "Less go git Marse Tom's money fer him!"

When a moment later the big automobile swung into the Massacre road leading to the old Kerlerac plantation house, Pap Curtain leaned over and whispered:

"Mustard, how you know dat Mobile is hid dat money under dat rock? S'posen you go dar an' don't find it? Whut'll happen den?"

Mustard turned almost white. Then he answered:

"Pap, ef I don't git dat money dese here white men will hang up my Chris'mus socks widout takin' me out of 'em!"

IX

BACK TO THE OLD FOLKS.

Entering the stone ruins of the old plantation-house, Mustard walked unerringly to the large, flat rock which Mobile had lifted a few hours

before and raised it from the ground. Pap Curtain clawed in the soft soil with his horny hands, then sprang to his feet with a yell.

He held the heavy canvas bag tied with a rawhide string.

Two hours later, Pap Curtain and Mustard Prophet, sons of sorrow, reach the pinnacle of happiness. Clothed in new garments, smoking cigars, rattling money in their pockets, they sat down in a banker's five-thousand-dollar automobile, the owner at the steering-wheel, and started their journey back to Tickfall and the old folks at home.

Mustard Prophet, responsive as mercury to the least chill in the atmosphere or the slightest increase in the warmth of fortune's sunshine, began to expand:

"Marse Tom, I shore hopes you'll take better keer of de rest of yo' dollars dan you did of dis bag of money. 'Twus a powerful hard day's wuck fer me when I got it back for you!"

No answer from Colonel Gaitskill. The miles sped by.

Then Mustard asked, with as much curiosity as if he had been gone thirty years instead of less than three days:

"Marse Tom, is Hopey livin' yit?"

"Yes."

"I bet dat nigger wife of mine makes 'miration over dese here fine clothes I'm got on."

Silence again, then a shout from both negroes:

"Bless Gawd! Dar's Tickfall."

When the car stopped in front of the bank, Gaitskill got out, carrying his money-bag, Pap and Mustard carrying their precious musical instruments.

"Marse Tom," Mustard inquired, "does I git my same job at de Nigger-Heel back agin?"

"Certainly."

"I's shore glad of dat, Marse Tom. Sheriff Ulloa offered me a job, but I ain't gwine take it."

"What did the sheriff want you to do?" Gaitskill smiled.

"He axed me to he'p him lay a pipe-line to de Milky Way so he could start a dairy."

Monarch of the Manacle.

"SKEETER, whose pup wus dat you wus totin' aroun' on yo' arm yistiddy?" Figger Bush asked as he sat down beside a table in the Hen-Scratch saloon. "I'd druther be dead dan be perceived packin' a pup."

"Dat warn't no common growl-an'-bark dawg," Skeeter grinned, blushing until his saddle-colored face turned to a deep brownish crimson. "Dat wus one of dese here Spitz dawgs. It b'longs to Tella Tandy, dat new gal whut jes' come to Tick-fall. I's keepin' it fer her."

"How come she don't keep it fer herse'f?" Figger inquired.

"She's stayin' down at Mustard Prophet's cabin, an' she's skeart Mustard's fox-houn's will eat her dawg up—dar he comes now!"

The little Pomeranian racked across the sandy floor of the saloon, small sharp ears erect, his fine intelligent eyes sparkling, his thick hair as fine and glossy as silk. He leaped into Skeeter's lap, and licked a tiny red tongue at Skeeter's face.

"Look out, Skeeter!" Figger exclaimed, pushing his chair out of the danger zone. "Ain't you skeart dat Spit dawg will spit in yo' face?"

"Naw!" Skeeter replied disgustedly. "Dey jes' calls him a Spitz dawg fer a name. Dat's a manner of speakin', as it were. Ef you buys a plug of Bull-dawg chawin' terbaccer, you don't especk to git bit, does yer?"

"You shorely muss be stuck on dat new gal ef you totes her dawg on de street an' feeds him puffeckly good vittles in de Hen-Scratch saloom," Figger replied, ignoring Skeeter's question.

"I *is* in love wid dat gal," Skeeter replied positively. "She's shore easy to look at, Figger. An' she specifies she is wuth one thousan' dollars."

"My Lawd!" Figger exclaimed fervently. "I'd be willin' to tote a whole litter of Spit dawgs fer her!"

"I wants you to he'p me ketch her, Figger," Skeeter said earnestly. "I needs about a thousan' dollars to make some improvements in dis bar-room, an' escusin' dat, de gal is plum' wuth havin'."

"Am she really got dat many money, or do she jes' value her carcass at dat many dollars?" Figger asked suspiciously.

"I dunno," Skeeter replied doubtfully. "All she said wus dat she wus *wuth* one thousan' dollars."

"Huh," Figger grunted skeptically. "She mought be pricin' herse'f too high."

Suddenly the green-baize doors of the saloon were thrust aside, and a clear voice called:

"Oh, Skeeter! Come out here!"

Skeeter jumped like someone had popped a

dynamite cap under his chair, and hastened out to the front. Figger followed slowly for the purpose of getting a good look at Skeeter's new girl.

She was well worth seeing. She was as slim and straight and graceful as a stalk of sugar-cane; her color was a little darker than Skeeter's; an Ethiopian type, with perfect features, a sinewy, cat-like movement of muscles under satiny skin, easy-smiling lips, which played constantly over perfectly beautiful teeth, and a speaking voice which any orator in the world would covet.

"Lawd," Figger sighed enviously. "She's wuth de thousan' dollars, all right."

"I wants my dawg, Skeeter," Tella Tandy said. "I's gwine down to de deppo to watch de train come in. Want to come wid me an' tote de dawg?"

"No'm," Skeeter answered regretfully, as he snapped his fingers and the little Spitz leaped under the saloon doors and sprang into his owner's arms. "I got to make a livin' keepin' bar. I'll go wid you some yuther time."

The woman walked down the street and Skeeter returned to the table where he had been sitting. He sighed like a furnace and wiped the sweat from his face.

"Figger," he said pantingly, "dat gal nearly gibs me de jim-jams eve'y time I sees her. I loses all de good sense I'm got. I feels like a fool an' I acks like a fool, an' 'pears to me like dat gal is laughin' at me all de time."

"I 'spect so," Figger said commiseratingly, as he arose to go. "Dem females is mos' in gineral

laughin' at us. But dem simpletoms you announce is shore a bad sign. Mattermony'll ketch you ef you don't watch out. Ef you needs any good advices, I 'speck you better send fer me."

Figger sauntered down to the depot, watched the passenger train arrive and depart, and then hurried back to the Hen-Scratch saloon.

"Bad luck, Skeeter!" he howled, as soon as he entered the room. "Dat Tella Tandy went down to de deppo to meet a man an' dat man looks like one of dese here watermillyumaires!"

"Lawdymussy!" Skeeter squeaked, springing to his feet. "I knowed my luck wus too good to last. Whar is dat new nigger man at?"

"Dey is bofe comin' up dis way," Figger informed him. "Dat new man is packin' de Spit dawg. I figger de load will break him down about time he gits to de Hen-Scratch."

For ten minutes the two sat in gloomy silence. Skeeter lighted cigarette after cigarette, twiddled his thumbs, jiggered his feet, and acted generally like a man with the St. Vitus dance. Figger was more composed. He was thankful that he was merely an innocent bystander. At last Skeeter sighed:

"Ef I lose dat gal, it'll bust my heart, Figger. I been courtin' her servigerous fer a week. My head is so full of tears now it would take a week to bail me out!"

Voices were heard at the door and Skeeter arose tremblingly and walked out. Tella and the strange man were waiting for him.

"Dis is my frein', Mr. Deo Diddle, Skeeter," Tella said easily. "I jes' been tellin' him how kind you wus to keep my dawg."

"Glad to meet yo' 'quaintance," Skeeter mumbled, holding out his hand.

"Same back at you," Deo replied. Then turning to Tella Tandy, he said: "Me an' dis dawg is got a little bizzness wid Mr. Muskeeter Butts, Tella. You foller yo' little nose down de street an' see ef he don't lead you somewhar else."

Skeeter and Deo Diddle entered the saloon and sat down at the table with Figger Bush. The dog sniffed around the room for a minute and then passed out toward the rear.

Deo Diddle was about the size of Skeeter Butts, but it required no expert eyes to see that he was a perfect athlete. The poise of his head and body, the accuracy and decision of even the slightest move, the steady, assured gaze of his eyes indicated a man whose muscles and brain were trained in some field of endeavor which required both strength and wit.

"At de fust offstartin', Mr. Butts," Deo Diddle began easily, "I announces my bizzness an' de puppus of my visit to Tickfall: I's a Monarch of de Manacle."

"You's a—a—*which?*" Skeeter asked, his eyes sticking out like a bug's.

"I gibs a show," Deo Diddle explained. "I lets people handcuff me an' I slips 'em off as easy as you kin take off a glove. I lets people nail me up in a box an' I gits out as easy as you kin git

outen dat chair. I lets people tie me in bed wid ropes an' I gits loose as easy as a pickaninny kin fall outen a hammock. An' on de side, I tells forchines, reads minds, finds lost treasures, an' gives a few sleight-of-han' tricks."

"Huh!" Skeeter and Figger grunted in a duet.

"Yes, suh," Deo Diddle went on. "I done hired dat hall down in de settlemint called Dirty-Six, an' I's gibin' a show eve'y night fer three nights. Would you wish to come?"

"I shore would!" Skeeter exclaimed eagerly.

"I's glad to hear you say dat, suh," Deo replied. "I's gwine gib a free pass to you an' Mr. Bush, an' I hopes you will speak up my show fer me. Admission ten cents fer chillun an' two-bits fer growed-ups!"

He handed Skeeter and Figger a slip of paper apiece, and rose and walked out of the saloon, leaving the two men to gaze after him in speechless astonishment. After a long time, Figger remarked:

"You done got yo' wuck cut out fer you, Skeeter. You know how batty female womans is about show folks!"

A show given by negroes will attract other negroes as a barrel of molasses attracts flies. The little hall in Dirty-Six was filled to its capacity a long time before the hour of the exhibition.

Skeeter Butts and Figger Bush occupied the front seat directly facing the center of the stage.

"Whar is Tella Tandy, Figger?" Skeeter asked uneasily, scanning the faces in the crowd. "I went to her house atter her an' dey tole me she'd done went. But I don't see her."

"She'll git here on time," Figger assured him. "She ain't hatin' dis Deo Diddle none, an' she'll watch him pufform."

Then the ragged curtain parted in the middle, one half being pulled to each side of the stage.

"Ladies an' gen'lemans," Deo Diddle began, "I's gwine gib a refined exhibition of sleight-of-hands fust of all, an' I defy anybody to kotch me at my tricks."

The stunts which followed were too simple and commonplace to mention, but they were wonderful because new to the Tickfall negroes. In a little while the whole house was vocal with the comments of the spectators, who made remarks in a loud voice, and sometimes got into an argument with some friend across the room.

"My Lawd," Hitch Diamond bellowed, when he saw the performer break an egg in a pan, scramble it, light an alcohol lamp and cook it, then lift out of the pan a live goose. "My Lawd, dat pufformance is agin nature!"

"'Tain't so!" the Reverend Vinegar Atts bawled from the other side of the house. "De Good Book says us shall see wonders in de heaven above an' de yearth beneath——"

"Aw, go up dar wid de buzzards!" Hitch Diamond retorted in a disgusted tone. "Not even

de good Lawd could make a nigger hatch a goose outen a scrambled hen's egg!"

In the meantime, Deo Diddle had turned his attention to a stove-pipe hat belonging to Vinegar Atts, and was winding yard after yard of colored paper out of the crown, catching it upon a wand.

"Us knowed you never did carry no brains in dat hat, Revun, even when you had it on yo' head!" Pap Curtain guffawed.

The spectators were getting their money's worth when Deo Diddle suddenly changed the performance.

"Friends," he announced, "I's gwine interjuice you to de mos' wonderful woman in de worl'. She kin set right here in dis chair an' tell you-alls all about yo'se'ves! She don't know nobody in dis town, but she is gwine mention names an' tell secrets out loud whut nobody ain't told her but de departed sperits of de yuther land!"

At that moment Tella Tandy walked out upon the stage and sat down.

Skeeter Butts sprang to his feet with a startled exclamation, then sank back again with a cold sick sensation at the pit of his stomach.

"Dat means I done lost my little she-goddess, Figger," he sighed pitifully. "'Tain't no use to hope no more."

"Aw, pert up, Skeeter!" his friend urged. "You ain't drapped de pertater yit!"

Tella Tandy appeared to be in a trance. She looked with unseeing eyes over the faces of the crowd, then began in a weak, uncertain voice:

"I ketch de name of Vinegar Atts—I sees a fly—shoo fly!—church. Revun Atts is 'postlizin' in de pulpit—de elder is gwine hab trouble in de cong'gation—he better watch his eye——

"I ketch de name of Prince Total—Marse Tom am lookin' fer dat lost demijahm whut Prince borrered—I 'speck Prince better fotch dat jug back befo' he keeps it buried too long by dat pine stump——

"I ketch de name of Pap Curtain—Pap is a slick-head nigger—a word from de sperit lan' tells Pap dat he better ketch de trabbel itch an' hike—de gram-jury meets nex' week——"

For twenty minutes this revelation held the audience in tense, dreadful silence—twenty minutes of frightful retrospection and introspection, and when a negro's name was mentioned that darky suffered a nervous shock from which he did not recover for a week. Even if his name was not mentioned, the darky was afraid it would be, and was appalled at what the revelation might be.

At last Tella Tandy rose from the chair, felt her way toward the side of the stage as if she were blind, rubbed her hands over her dazed eyes, and exclaimed in a dramatic voice:

"De book of de recordin' angel is closed, an' de sperit land reveals no more!"

"Bless Gawd!" Hitch Diamond bellowed fervently.

Deo Diddle then brought out a cot and set it in the middle of the stage. He threw down upon the floor a coil of rope many feet in length and addressed the audience:

"I wants about ten men to come up on dis flatform and tie me to dis cot. I offers to bet ten dollars I kin git loose in two minutes!"

"I takes dat bet, bully!" Skeeter Butts squealed as he sprang to his feet and climbed upon the platform.

"Me, too!" came a chorus of voices, and Vinegar Atts, Prince Total, Pap Curtain, Hitch Diamond, and a number of others who had been accused of various crimes and misdemeanors by Tella Tandy followed Skeeter to the stage.

They carefully examined the cot and rope. Then Deo Diddle stretched himself out upon it, lying flat upon the mattress with his feet together and his hands down at his sides. Vinegar Atts and Hitch Diamond passed the rope around and around him, crossing and crisscrossing it over his feet and body and neck until he was swathed like a mummy and apparently as helpless.

Then the committee climbed off the platform and left Deo to free himself in full view of the crowd.

Deo entertained the crowd for a minute by a mighty struggling and tugging and jerking and grunting, but all the while Deo's right hand was resting upon a lateral bar under the cot which held the mattress taut. At the proper time Deo simply slipped this bar out of its fastening on one side of the cot; the mattress sagged down in the middle like a hammock, with the many coils of rope across Deo, but hardly touching his body.

Then Deo climbed from under the rope as easily

as a pig slips through a gap in the fence and was free!

The shout of applause which greeted this performance almost lifted the roof, and amid the noise Deo and Tella quickly removed the cot so that the committee could not examine it again.

"Us will hab a entirely diffunt show tomorrer night, my frien's," Deo announced when the noise and excitement subsided. "I is knowed all over de worl' an' in Yurope as de Monarch of de Manacle. I's de only real nigger Handcuff King in dis country. Tomorrer night I's gwine hab eve'y kind of handcuff whut is used by de sheriffs an' policemens of dis country an' furin parts, and I'll let you handcuff me up any way you please, an' ef I don't git loose in five minutes I'll gib you twenty-five dollars reward. Fetch all de handcuffs you is got aroun' de house an' watch de Handcuff King pufform!"

"I'll git dat reward-bill!" Skeeter Butts squealed.

"All right, pardner!" Deo laughed. "Do yo' durndest! Good-night!"

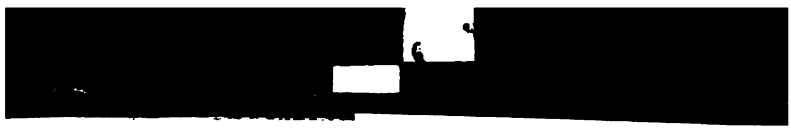
While the people were leaving Skeeter Butts climbed back upon the stage and confronted Tella Tandy.

"Is you married to dis Deo Diddle, Tella?" he asked earnestly.

"Suttinly," Tella laughed. "Ain't Deo a wonder?"

"Whut you mean by makin' a fool outen me?" Skeeter demanded.

"Don't pick no fuss wid me, Skeeter!" Tella



said. "Dis is a free country an' you made love at me wid yo' own mind. I couldn't he'p it ef you handed me yo' heart tied up in a paper-sack."

Skeeter glared at her a moment, then turned and started away.

"I don't bear you no grudge fer dem lovin' words, Skeeter," Tella snickered.

Skeeter Butts spent a large part of the night in deep meditation.

The next morning all his friends crowded into the Hen-Scratch to discuss the show. Tella Tandy's revelations interested them most.

"How come dat purty little coon knowed all about me so good?" Vinegar Atts wanted to know.

"How did she know dat a gram-jury meetin' is de real sign fer me to leave dis town?" Pap Curtain inquired.

"How did she guess dat I swiped Marse Tom Gaitskill's licker-jug an' had it hid out ferninst a pine stump?" Prince Total wanted to know.

"I kin answer all dem 'terrogations, niggers," Skeeter Butts grinned. "When dat gal fust come to town I didn't know she wus connected up wid no show, an' I didn't had no idear she wus married, an' I armed her aroun' an' tried to git her to love me. She axed me about a millyum questions about you-alls, an' las' night when she pulled up dat stunt she was jes' repeatin' over whut I done tole her!"

"My Lawd!" Prince Total exclaimed. "Dat

warn't no fair. I wus mighty nigh skeart to death."

"I reckin so," Vinegar Atts bellowed. "Yo' mem'ry ain't loaded wid nothin' but blank ca'tridges ontil people begins to talk about yo' meanness—den yo' shore is got plenty ammunition of remembrunce."

"I hope she ain't gwine pull no more of dat stuff," Pap Curtain said uneasily. "How much did you tell her 'bout me, Skeeter?"

"She's done turned loose all she knows," Skeeter replied.

"I hope so," Pap said menacingly. "Ef she revelates any mo' about me I knows a yeller-faced bar-keep' who is gwine hab his mug pounded into anodder color."

"No danger—I ain't skeart," Skeeter said with a dry grin. "I realizes dat wus a mistake."

There was silence for a few minutes, a drink for the crowd at Skeeter's expense, and then Skeeter mentioned a plan he had matured in the night:

"Cain't us niggers fix up some kind of buzzo on dat gal an' git even wid her?" he asked.

"Whut mought dat buzzo be?" Vinegar Atts inquired.

"Well, suh, I figgers it out dis way: Dat Deo Diddle is offered a reward fer any handcuffs he can't git out of. Now ef Sheriff Marse John Flournoy would only loan us some handcuffs——"

"Listen to dat nigger's brains a-poppin'!" Prince Total exclaimed in extreme admiration.

"Fer mussy sake, Skeeter, go see Marse John right now. I'll keep dis saloom."

The crowd sat down to wait while Skeeter hastened to the courthouse, entered the sheriff's office, and stood, hat in hand, grinning at Mr. John Flournoy.

"Come in, Skeeter," Flournoy said. "I won't lend any money, won't hear any nigger love scrapes, won't give any advice, won't listen to any of your troubles. Excusing all those things, what else do you want?"

Skeeter grinned. As he would have expressed it, Marse John was his "kinnery." He had grown up in a cabin in the sheriff's yard, and this big-bodied, kind-hearted sheriff held few terrors for Skeeter.

"Dar, now, Marse John, you'll shore hab room fer a good appetite atter you is got all dem words offen yo' stomick. I come to git a view from you about how to colleck a twenty-five dollars reward-bill."

"That's interesting," Flournoy grinned. "Let's have the details."

"Well, suh, a nigger is habin' a show in dis town an' he calls hisse'f a Handcuff King. He specify dat he's a Monarch of de Manacle. He argufy dat dar ain't no kind of handcuff made dat he can't git hisse'f loose from in less'n five minutes. Does you reckin dat is so, Marse John?"

"Certainly," the sheriff answered promptly.

"How come?" Skeeter asked.

This was one theme upon which the sheriff was

competent to speak. He leaned back in his chair, lighted a cigar, and began:

"There are one hundred and forty-two varieties of handcuffs and leg-irons manufactured in the civilized world, Skeeter, but there are only thirty-two separate brands which are registered for use by officers of the law in the United States. Four master keys will unlock all thirty-two of these leg-irons and handcuffs."

"Listen to dat!" Skeeter exclaimed.

"I venture to say that that negro showman has all the regulation handcuffs in use in this country, as well as some of European manufacture. Of course, he also has the keys to unlock them."

"Whar do he tote de keys?" Skeeter asked eagerly.

"Oh—everywhere!" Flournoy smiled. "In the lining of his clothes, in his shoes and socks, in his sleeves and cuffs, down his collar, even in his mouth—everywhere!"

"Huh!" Skeeter grunted. "Dat's too bad."

There was a long silence while Flournoy smilingly watched Skeeter think. The negro's face was a pantomime of conflicting emotions, and the general effect made for gloom and depression. Finally Flournoy spoke:

"My information seems to discourage you, Skeeter. What's the problem?"

"It's dis way, Marse John," Skeeter said earnestly. "Dat uppity, biggity nigger is done offered twenty-five dollars reward fer any handcuff he

cain't git off in five minutes, an' I figgered dat I had a show to make de money."

Flournoy thought a moment, then broke into a loud chuckle.

"I think you have a splendid chance to copper the coin, Skeeter. Wait here a minute!"

Flournoy opened a steel door, walked to the rear of the vault, and pawed over a lot of trash in one corner. Then he came out and tossed a handful of police hardware on the floor at Skeeter's feet.

"I think they will hold him," Flournoy laughed.

Skeeter gasped as he eyed the cruelest collection of manacles and shackles he had ever seen.

There was a pair of home-made wrought-iron handcuffs with a stiff iron bar a foot long to connect the bracelets instead of a chain. There was a pair of cumbersome leg-irons which were used a half century ago in Southern convict camps, but whose use is now prohibited. And there was something else which gave Skeeter a sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach merely to look at. It was a pair of trigger cuffs. Any attempt to loosen them by the wearer has the effect of tightening the bracelets while at the same time a needle trigger presses deeper and deeper into the flesh of the wrist until the captive is helpless with pain.

"When I was first elected sheriff, forty years ago, this stuff was in use, Skeeter. I won't give you the keys to these manacles. If you get them on that coon he'll certainly need me! You can telephone me at the house to-night after Deo the Diddle forks over that twenty-five plunks to you!"

Skeeter wrapped the hardware in a newspaper and trod on air as he walked back to the Hen-Scratch saloon. When he told the waiting crowd of his success and showed them the manacles the darkies had a jubilee and then waited with the impatience of children for the night to come.

The front row of seats was occupied that night by Skeeter Butts, Figger Bush, Vinegar Atts, Pap Curtain, Prince Total, Hitch Diamond, and a few others of that type who were smarting under the public revelations of the recording angel the night before.

The house was crowded to suffocation and the performance consisted of fortune-telling, feats of magic, singing, and dancing.

At last the time came for the Monarch of the Manacle to make good his boast that he could get out of any handcuff or leg-iron which the community could provide for his bonds.

Up to this time Deo had found it perfectly safe everywhere to offer to release himself from any handcuffs which the negroes could provide, for a handcuff was something which no negro possessed, and with all their barbaric love of jewelry it was an ornament which no darky cared to wear. When no manacles were supplied by the audience, Deo would then invite a committee to come upon the stage and examine his. He would present forty different kinds for their inspection and let them choose any sort to place upon his legs and wrists. As they were all familiar to Deo, well oiled and in good condition, he had no trouble in releasing himself.

But this time Deo Diddle was up against it!

Skeeter Butts was Sheriff John Flournoy's "nigger." And for that reason he was probably the only colored person in the South who could go to a sheriff and get the assortment of manacles which he now had wrapped in a newspaper and hidden under his seat.

When Deo invited a local committee to come upon the stage, asking for anyone who would volunteer, every occupant of the first row of seats sprang to his feet and started for the platform.

This prompt and concerted action told Deo Diddle that he was in danger, that the men were out for his blood. He was frightened, and although he tried to carry himself with an easy manner it was apparent to all the committee that he was anxious and distrait.

Deo promptly decided not to ask for any handcuffs to be provided by the people in the assembly. To cover his retreat he began his announcement of the next evening's performance:

"Dis is de las' stunt on our plogram to-night, but tomorrer we is gwine hab de biggest show of all. I'll ax a committee to nail me up in a box atter dey has handcuffed me, an' I'll let 'em tie de box up wid a rope, an' I'll promise to git out in five minutes!"

Then for twenty minutes Deo entertained the audience by escaping from his own leg-irons and handcuffs. The negroes devised every sort of method to manacle his legs and wrists, but when the curtain of the little booth which was rigged

upon the stage had been pulled together in half a minute or a minute Deo walked out a free man!

Then Skeeter Butts unwrapped his newspaper and tossed his assortment of police hardware at the feet of Deo Diddle!

Deo looked down at that appalling mass of wrought iron and steel and shuddered. He had never seen anything like them before. His heart stood still and his breath stopped. Then he laughed, a nervous, cackling, uneasy laugh, merely to gain time to think.

He picked up the three dreadful instruments and held them before the audience—the wrought-iron bracelets with the lateral bar—old, rusty, out of date, the keyhole filled with rust and dirt; the horrible leg-irons which a man could not escape from in half a day with the use of a sharp file, and the cruel trigger cuffs with their torturing needle. He described each fetter minutely, explained how it was made, told how quickly and easily he expected to escape from its bonds, all the time praying desperately for some way of escape from his awful predicament.

During this speech Tella Tandy came and sat down beside Skeeter Butts. Skeeter grinned triumphantly into her face, then gave his entire attention to the spiel of Deo Diddle. Several times Tella spoke to Skeeter, but he answered in gruff tones and finally told her to shut up.

Then Deo did something which made Skeeter's jaw drop with despair—he closed each of the gaping manacles with a loud snap!

And Skeeter did not have a key to open them again!

Then Tella Tandy did a most astounding thing —she sprang to her feet with a loud, shrill scream!

Everybody turned and looked at her with astonishment—Skeeter Butts most astonished of all.

"Whut you mean by sayin' dat to me, Skeeter Butts?" she whooped. "You is a low-down nigger to insult a lady like dat! Oh, my Gawd!"

Tella put her hands over her face and staggered from the stage, crying aloud like a baby.

Skeeter Butt's jaw dropped down and he gaped like an idiot—he had not said a word or done a thing!

He was so startled by the woman's accusation and her dramatic exit that when he tried to speak and deny his guilt he stammered and spluttered and looked guiltier than ever.

"Whut you mean by insultin' my wife, you low-down animated outrage?" Deo Diddle howled, approaching Skeeter with blood in his eye.

"I—I—didn't—say—nothin'!" Skeeter stammered.

"Kill him! Put him out! Bust him one in de jaw!" the men in the audience roared, as they listened to the heart-rending wails of the caterwauling Tella Tandy somewhere in the wings.

Deo Diddle's fist lunged out with all his strength behind it. Skeeter ducked, dodged under the showman's arms, grabbed up Sheriff Flournoy's criminal hardware, and fled for his life.

The next morning Skeeter was kept busy explain-

ing to his many patrons that he had been guilty of no offense and that Tella Tandy had played a trick on him to keep him from winning the twenty-five dollars.

To Skeeter's surprise, nobody believed him.

"Naw, suh," the reverend Vinegar Atts proclaimed, "you muss hab said somepin shameful to dat little gal. She wusn't show-actin' when she bust out cryin' like dat."

"Dat's de way I figger," Hitch Diamond growled. "Ef you wus a' innercent man, how come you didn't stan' yo' ground' an' fight when dat Deo wus fixin' to pound yo' face in?"

"I ain't no fightin' man," Skeeter protested. "I's a bizzness man. But I didn't say nothin' an' I didn't do nothin' — I wus discriminated agin by dem show folks!"

"Aw, hush!" Pap Curtain exclaimed disgustedly. "I heerd whut you said to dat little gal an' it wus plum' insultin'."

"You better fetch dem same handcuffs back tonight, Skeeter," Prince Total grinned. "Yo' bes' chance to insult dat lady is atter we nail Deo up in dat box."

"Aw, shut up!" Skeeter snapped.

The men gradually talked themselves out and went away. Skeeter turned to his one friend and sympathizer, Figger Bush.

"Figger," he said, "I's gwine git even wid dat pair of crooks or die. Is you willin' to he'p me?"

"Suttinly," Figger agreed eagerly. "I think dem show folks done you powerful bad."

"We begins right now," Skeeter announced, as he got up and went back to a rear room and came out with Tella's Spitz dog.

"Come out in front wid me, Figger," Skeeter said, as he led the dog out of the door and stopped in the middle of the cinder sidewalk. "I want you to hold dis dawg for me."

"Whut you gwine do?" Figger inquired.

"I's gwine git back about fawty feet, take a little run, an' kick dis dang dawg so fur dat de nex' time he spits it'll be in Arkansas!" Skeeter announced viciously.

"I's wid you!" Figger chuckled, as he spraddled his legs and grasped the Pomeranian by his bushy, silky tail. "Kick de goal!"

Skeeter made a little run and almost kicked a hole in the sky. His right foot went up like he had hitched it to a star. For the little dog squatted and Skeeter missed him!

Then the dog got busy.

He snapped at Figger and Figger let go his tail. He sunk his sharp little teeth in the seat of Skeeter's pantaloons and Skeeter went down the street at full speed, exhausting the treasuries of his throat to vocalize his fright. The dog held on until the seat of Skeeter's trousers parted company with the rest of the garment and came away. Then the dog, well satisfied, trotted happily down the street, growling ferociously and stopping at intervals to shake the everlasting stuffing out of the piece of cloth which he had captured.

Figger Bush lay flat down upon the ground and

whooped with laughter until the town reverberated with the echo of his hilarity like a pack of hounds chasing a fox. When he saw Skeeter returning, he decided it would be safer to go down town and see what time it was. So he went.

But in less than an hour Figger returned in great excitement, bringing with him a little, timid negro woman with a tiny baby upon her arm.

He led her through the saloon to a rear room, motioning mysteriously to Skeeter as he passed. When they were all seated at a table Figger said:

"Now, Mrs. Diddle, you tell dat tale whut you jes' told me—dis man who wants to listen is Skeeter Butts."

The woman hesitated a moment, looked down fondly at the tiny bundle on her breast, and began to speak in a trembling, uneasy voice:

"I come up here huntin' fer a nigger named Deo Diddle. He's my cote-house husbund. Dis is his little pickaninny chile I's nursin'. Deo, he gibs shows, but he's got kinder keerless an' done fergot all about me, I reckin. So I come to rattle up his remembrunce."

"Yes'm," Skeeter exclaimed with unction. "Dat wus de most properest thing you could do. I's shore glad you foun' me so prompt, fer I's jes' de man to lead you straight on to Deo Diddle."

"Dat's fine," the woman exclaimed, rising eagerly to her feet. "I hopes you'll take me dar right now."

"No'm," Skeeter declared. "It cain't be did suddent like dat. I don't know whar dat nigger

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

Skeeter went down the street at full speed.

is now, but he's gwine gib a show in dis town to-night, an' I'll take good keer of you an' dat baby an' den lead you to de show. Dat is, ef you'll do jes' whut I tells you."

"I shore will," the woman said fervently.

"Figger," Skeeter commanded, "you take sister Diddle over to de Halfacre an' tell ole sister Ginny Chew to keep her till I come atter her to-night. Den you come right back to dis saloom, an' you an' me will fix up our plans fer de evenin' pufformance."

The day passed slowly for Skeeter Butts, and when the night came he occupied a seat in the front row in the hall directly in the center of the stage, with Figger Bush sitting beside him.

None of the performance interested Skeeter until Deo Diddle announced that he was now ready to accomplish the "box escape." He challenged the negroes to provide a pine box in which he would be securely nailed and roped up, first being handcuffed and shackled in any way the negroes chose. Then he proposed to escape, leaving the box and the ropes intact.

When the committee climbed upon the stage, Skeeter did not join them. He handed a tiny vial of liquid to Figger Bush and said:

"Now, Figger, you go up dar an' do exackly whut I told you!"

Deo Diddle was carefully handcuffed, manacled, chained, and bound by the grinning, laughing negroes; then he was lifted up and lowered carefully into the box.

Figger Bush reached for a hammer, and Tella Tandy stood by with a cigar box full of long wire nails, handing them to Figger as he nailed Deo in the box. Then Tella produced a long rope, and the husky negroes bound that box as a trunk is wrapped for a journey. When all were satisfied they stepped back, but Figger returned for a moment and made another careful examination of the box and the ropes.

Finally the curtains were drawn around the little booth and the crowd waited breathlessly.

Skeeter Butts arose and hastily departed from the hall.

Two things had happened to Deo Diddle which were sure to cause him trouble, and Deo found it out instantly.

First, Figger Bush had nailed Deo's coat-tail to the top of the box. And second, when Figger went back to examine the box a second time he had emptied a small bottle of formaldehyde into one of the air-holes!

If there is one chemical fluid with which the inhabitants of Louisiana, white and black, are familiar, it is that colorless, volatile liquid, chemically intermediate between methyl alcohol and formic acid, called formaldehyde. It has an odor which suggests all the dead and decaying things of earth, animal and vegetable, all the putrefaction and corruption imaginable. When a man gets a whiff of it for the first time, he kneels down right there and prays to die—he doesn't want to live another second with that stench in his nostrils.

It is the supreme germicide and disinfectant of every yellow-fever epidemic, which accounts for Louisiana's close and intimate acquaintance with it. Any self-respecting yellow-fever germ will instantly tuck his tail and scoot when he gets a good smell of that gosh-awful disinfectant.

But formaldehyde was a preparation with which Deo Diddle was not acquainted.

Figger Bush, listening intently, heard sounds which resembled those made by a dog having a fit in a cigar box and knocking his feet against the box on all sides. Then Figger heard a loud panting like a worn-out engine pulling a grade with a log-train. After that, a moan, which deepened into a hoarse cry; then Deo Diddle lost hold of himself completely and began a hideous sort of sharp yelping like a dog.

"Hel-lup! Hel-lup! Fer Gawd's sake——" he screamed.

But long before this Tella Tandy had torn the curtains aside and was fighting the box with her hands, trying to let in the air.

Skeeter Butts, standing by the door at the side entrance with Mrs. Deo Diddle and the baby, heard the excitement and the screaming, and grinned with delight.

"Come on, sister Diddle," Skeeter exclaimed exultantly. "I'll show you yo' kind, good husbunt now. Us is got him in a box!"

He led her through the side entrance to the stage just as Vinegar Atts struck the pine box a heavy blow with the ax, cut the ropes, knocked off

the top, and lifted the half-unconscious, and wholly terrified Handcuff King out of the box, his coat-tail nailed securely, his hands and ankles still manacled, and the bottom of the box containing dozens of keys which Deo had dropped in his eagerness and haste to escape!

In the meantime, the entire audience had taken its departure. Even Vinegar Atts left after he released the formaldehyde with the magician. There was no attraction on the stage which could enable them to endure that dreadful odor. Figger Bush lingered around the front door, sticking his head out at intervals to get a breath of pure air.

"Dat's him!" Skeeter exclaimed dramatically, as he pointed to the drooping form of Deo Diddle, who was rapidly reviving, although he still hung to the shattered box by his coat-tail. "Dat's de villyum whut is done run off from his wife an' chile an' tuck up wid anodder woman!"

"Who—*him!*" Mrs. Diddle exclaimed, pointing to the performer. "Huh—dat ain't my husbant—his name is Jim Tom Wyatt!"

Then she turned and faced the frightened Tella Tandy.

"Hello, Tella!" she exclaimed. "Whar is Deo?"

"He got drunk in Kerlerac an' fit a white man to a shirt-tail finish an' de jedge put him in jail fer fawty days," Tella explained. "Me an' Jim Tom is tryin' to carry on de show till Deo gits out, an', of co'se, Jim Tom is usin' Deo's name."

"Dar now, Skeeter Butts!" Mrs. Diddle exclaimed. "Whut you lie to me fer?"

"Did dat little yeller debbil hab anything to do wid dis?" Tella asked, pointing at Skeeter's face.

"Of co'se he did!" Mrs. Diddle exclaimed. "He done it all!"

Tella Tandy promptly wrenched off a piece of the shattered box about two feet long and three inches wide, and gave Skeeter a resounding slap across the jaw.

Skeeter reeled backward, stumbled down the steps, and fled out into the street.

Figger watched the people on the stage for a minute, then hastened down the street after Skeeter. He found his friend sitting on a curbstone nursing a bloody face.

"Dey done me up, Figger," Skeeter mourned. "I never seed de beat of show-folks fer fust-rate brains. Even dat Spit dawg is smarter dan me!"

"Whut is us gwine do nex', Skeeter?" Bush asked sympathetically.

"I's gwine to de cote-house an' hab dat Tella Tandy arrested fer assault an' battery!" Skeeter exclaimed revengefully.

Figger sighed pitifully.

"'Twon't do you no good, Skeeter," Figger informed him. "You can't git her fer nothin' but assault."

"How come?" Skeeter asked.

"Atter she hit you dat whale across de face," Figger explained, "I saw her take de ax an' chop dat battery all to little pieces!"

All is Fair.

I

THE HORSE RACE.

SHIN BONE needed money badly. He sat on the edge of the sidewalk by the old cotton shed, his feet in the gutter and his head resting upon his hands, and did the heaviest thinking of his whole thoughtless life.

"I'd rob Marse Tom's bank ef I jes' knowed how," he said, speaking aloud to himself.

Then he wondered if he had spoken too loud, for Colonel Tom Gaitskill stopped directly behind him in his walk to the bank, and surveyed with amusement a number of gaudy lithographs which had been pasted upon the side of the cotton shed.

Shin Bone sat perfectly quiet until he had assured himself that Gaitskill had not overheard him, then a shrewd look came into his eyes, and he rose to his feet. Taking a corn-cob pipe from his pocket, he filled it with tobacco, and edged up closer to the white man.

"When is de succus gwine be, Marse Tom?" he

asked, as he struck a match and applied the flame to the bowl of his pipe.

"This is no circus, Shin," Gaitskill said shortly. "Where have you been all the time? Haven't you heard anything about the nigger uplift?"

Every negro knows the advantage which accrues to himself from letting the white man tell him. Carefully concealing the fact that these same gaudy lithographs had caused his grief over his poverty, Shin said:

"Naw, suh—yes, suh. De white folks is always doin' somepin to us niggers. But I cain't figger out dese shiny new bills on dis wall."

"Those lithographs announce a negro fair at the old race track," Colonel Gaitskill told him. "There will be prizes for all kinds of garden truck and field crops, prizes for chickens, pigs, and cattle, prizes for draft horses, carriage horses, and all kinds of horses. Admission is free for all the negroes, all the exhibits will be by the negroes, and the white folks are financing the fair for the benefit of the negroes."

"Dat shore will be a lift-up," Shin Bone grinned, as he gazed with admiration at the pictures of the running horses. "Does us be allowed to had races, too?"

"Yes, there'll be speed exhibits," Gaitskill smiled. "But every negro who enters a horse for a race must own the horse."

"Dat's right," Shin Bone agreed heartily. "Ef dat's de rule, de niggers cain't borry no real race hosses an' git all our money away from us."

"Betting will not be permitted," Gaitskill remarked, watching Shin Bone closely. "That is against the law."

"Huh," Shin Bone grunted, and the tone of his voice and the expression on his face were those of a baby just tuning up to cry. But Gaitskill checked the deluge of tears by his next remark:

"Of course, the chief characteristic of the sport of kings must not be allowed to die out entirely, and if a few bets are made on the quiet, it is nobody's business. I am sure every darky will put down a dollar or two just to try his luck."

"Huh," Shin Bone grunted, and this time the tone of his voice and the expression on his face set Gaitskill to laughing merrily.

"Dat's de only spote whut will fetch de niggers to even a free fair, Marse Tom. Dey ain't comin' here jes' to show deir spindle-laig chickens an' deir little runt pigs. Dey wants to action aroun' wid de ponies."

"I think you're right, Shin," Gaitskill grinned. "I've been going to fairs ever since I was old enough to stand on the seat and yell, but I never could get up any interest or enthusiasm for anything except the slim horses which galloped swiftly around the circular track."

"Ain't you spoke de jaw-breakin' truth!" Shin Bone applauded. "Eve'y nigger whut comes to dis fair will hab his cotton-fiel' pet bang-tailed an' trained fer de races! Marse Tom, ain't you got no cheap, spry-legged hoss you wants to sell me?"

"No!" Gaitskill walked on.

"Whut 'bout dat pie-faced sorrel, Kunnel?" Shin persisted, following a few steps behind.

"How many races do you think you could win with a horse which had been bitten on the leg by a swamp rattlesnake?" Gaitskill asked disgustedly.

"Not such a many," Shin remarked, in a disappointed tone. "Of co'se, dat leg mought git well——"

"The horse is ruined, Shin," Gaitskill told him. "That leg will always be stiff."

Shin Bone stopped, watched the colonel until he turned the corner, then he returned to the gaudy lithographs and resumed his former position on the curb, dropping down in an attitude of dejection and deep meditation.

"Marse Tom oughter had sold me dat hoss," he sighed. "My credick wid him oughter be good. He knows I had plenty money in his bank las' mont' an' drawed it all out to buy dat eatin'-house. Of co'se, I couldn't win nothin' wid dat cripple hoss, but I might could swap him off fer somepin dat I *could* win wid."

Shin Bone refilled his pipe, dug his heels deeper in the soft loam of the gutter, rubbed his chin reflectively, and gazed across the street with troubled, brooding eyes.

"Dat little gal got me in dis jam," he announced finally.

Of course there was a girl in it.

After meeting her, Shin Bone bought a new suit of clothes, a cake of sweet-scented soap, three white shirts, and a bankrupt restaurant, fondly hoping

that personal cleanliness, personal adornment, and the ownership of property would help him persuade the girl to make up her mind to live with him. But alas, the four hundred dollars which he had in the bank were spent before he got started, and now the fair was on with a chance to make big winnings, and Shin Bone was broke!

"Jes' when I wus gittin' ready to ax her, I went bust," Shin groaned. "Jes' when she done got her mind encouraged up to take me, my little dab of money gib out."

Yes, Shin needed money.

He began to search his clothes for money, feeling in every pocket. He brought forth one silver dollar and one copper cent.

"I didn't make no new discovery," he lamented, as he surveyed his earthly fortune. "I knowed I had dis money already."

He placed the dollar on the curb beside him and laid the copper cent on top of the silver coin, surveying them disconsolately. Glancing down at his feet, he observed a tiny red earthworm crawling in the loam of the gutter. He picked this up and laid it on top of the copper coin, thus making a pyramid of his fortune.

"Huh," he grunted, "I'd rather be a fishin' worm dan a nigger wid one dollar an' one cent."

Suddenly he looked at the fishing worm with a new interest. It was twisting and turning upon the copper coin evidently wishing to get off, but every time it touched the silver dollar it retreated to the copper coin again.

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

The pie-faced sorrel with the snake-bitten leg.

"Dis worm 'pears like it's skeart of dis dollar," Shin muttered.

He flicked the worm into the grass with his finger nail, slipped his two coins in the upper breast pocket of his coat, then arose and walked slowly up the street.

At the nearest corner he met Whiffle Boone, dressed like a sun-burst, and on her way to the fair.

"You ain't lookin' so powerful peart, Shinny," she said.

"Ef I looks like I feels, you better git de sheriff to put me in a cage," was Shin's reply.

"Whut ails you?" the girl inquired solicitously.

"Ef I wus to tell you whut ails me, you'd snicker right in my face," Shin Bone declared irritably. "An' ef you did, I'd shore spile all de nice clothes you is got on."

The girl sniffed and passed on.

"Dar now," Shin lamented. "I didn't aim to start nothin' wid Whiffle. Dis is shore my onforchnit day."

But a moment later Shin forgot all his troubles.

Pap Curtain met him and shook hands with great cordiality. Pap's yellow face was a glowing golden color from excitement, his shifty eyes were more uncertain than ever, and his sneering mouth had a still uglier twist.

"Whut you bettin' on to-day, Shin?" he whispered hoarsely.

"I's collectin' tips, Pap," Shin replied.

"I got a shore thing, Shin," Pap whispered.

"Three hosses starts in de fourth race. Put yo' bet on Skipper."

"I shore thank you fer dem few kind words, Pap," Shin declared with delight. "How come yo' heart busted open so free?"

"Ain't you figgerin' on gittin' married to my sister's child?" Pap asked.

"Suttinly."

"Well, suh, dat's de reason. But fer Gawd's sake, keep de secret in de fambly!"

II

SKIPPER'S FORM.

"Dat shore he'ps me a lot," Shin exulted, as he started rapidly down the street. "All I'm got to do is to bet on dat hoss fer a winner."

Then his rapid gait suddenly ceased, his knees wabbled weakly, and he leaned against a convenient picket fence.

"O Lawd," he groaned. "Dat jes' makes my sorrer cut mo' deeper. I ain't got no mo' money to bet wid now dan I had befo' I got dat tip!"

Sadly he turned his back to the fair and walked in the opposite direction, mumbling to himself.

"Dat's always my luck," he mourned. "Ef it rains soup my plate is turned upside down, an' ef gold dollars draps down from de sky, I'm shore to be locked up in jail."

He passed along the ever-lengthening stream of negroes going to the races.

"Look at Shinny goin' back to dig up some mo' of his buried money," was the common greeting of every group of friends he met. "Somebody is been talkin' to Shin about some hoss, an' tellin' ain't no fair!"

Shin scanned every face as a panhandler watches the crowd on the street looking for some easy mark from whom he can extract a "temporary" loan, but there was no face which indicated that the owner was willing to part with even a little of his money in behalf of an impecunious friend. Each one would have promised him all he wanted—after the races.

At last Shin met the Rev. Vinegar Atts.

"Elder," he began, "I think I done got a tail-holt on somepin' mighty good an' I been lookin' fer you."

"Yes, suh, dat's right, son," Vinegar boomed. "Of co'se, I ain't no gamblin' man myse'f, an' don't b'lieve in it, but I likes to hear tips so I kin know whut hoss to watch."

"Is you got any change on you, elder?" Shin asked eagerly.

"A few, a measly few!" Vinegar rumbled. "Whut hoss did you say?"

"I ain't say," Shin replied.

"Why don't you bawl out?" Vinegar bellowed. "I cain't stand here on my foots all day! Git yo' mouf gwine!"

"You an' me oughter make a trade, elder," Shin said. "I got de idear an' you is got de chink. You gimme all de money you is got, an' I'll 'tend

to dat part of it while you watches de hosses gallop."

"I's skeart you'll lose my dollars," Vinegar said uneasily, fumbling the change in his voluminous pockets. "Mebbe you better tell me fust whut kind of tip you is got."

"Pap Curtain tole me to bet on Skipper in de fourth race," Shin said earnestly. "Don't you think dat is a good tip?"

Vinegar turned and walked away a few steps, then turned and walked back. His hands were thrust deep into his trouser pockets and his chin was sunk down upon his breast.

"Naw, dat ain't no good tip a-tall!" he exploded. "Pap Curtain is a slick-head nigger, as full of tricks as a monkey wid a tin tail. I don't hab no trust in him no-time, no-whar, no-how! You better gib dat Skipper de go-by."

"Pap ain't tryin' to fool me, Vinegar," Shin Bone protested. "I's gwine marry his sister's onlies' chile, an' so me an' him is in de same fambly. Excusin' dat, dis Skipper hoss b'longs to my gal's maw. Dat proves he ain't tryin' to rob me."

"You ain't on to Pap Curtain's curves yit, Shin," Vinegar told him. "Pap would steal de gold outen his granmaw's jaw toofs, ef de ole woman had any toofs in her gums. Excusin' dat, Pap don't expeck you to lose no money. He knows you ain't got none."

"Dat's a fack," Shin admitted.

"He knowed you would git active an' succulate

de tip," Vinegar told him. "He knowed you'd git aroun' an' try to borrer some money, an' tell all de niggers you touched fer a few change whut hoss to bet on, an' he knowed dat eve'y nigger in Tickfall would fall fer de losin' hoss. I bet Pap's got all his money on de yuther hoss right dis minute!"

"I don't b'lieve Pap would treat me dat way, Vinegar," Shin insisted. "He tole me not to tell nobody, because he wanted to keep de secret in de fambly."

"Did he know you wus broke?" Vinegar asked.

"Yep. I tried to borrer some money from him dis mawnin'."

"Ef he loves you so awful much, how come he didn't loant you some money an' let you win an' gib you a start fer de yuther days of racin'?"

"Dat do look like he ain't actin' plum' honest," Shin admitted reluctantly. "But, you see, it's dis way, Vinegar: niggers wants to manage deir own money endurin' of de fair."

"Dat's whut I's gwine do," Vinegar told him in a pompous voice. "Dat bait you dangles down in front my nose am pretty temptin' to a sucker, but you done showed me too much of de hook. Excusin' dat, I jes' remembers dat I's been app'inted de officious starter at de races, an' shouldn't oughter bet on *no* hoss!"

Vinegar resumed his walk toward the fairgrounds, leaving Shin Bone to ponder what he had heard.

"I b'lieves dat Pap Curtain is totin' fair wid me," he concluded at last. "My onlies' hope is

to pussuade some yuther nigger to b'lieve de same way an' put up de dough. I reckin I better git busy."

Shin met Hitch Diamond and presented his proposition to him. Hitch laughed at him.

"Three hosses starts in dat race, Shin," Hitch chuckled. "Doodlebug b'longs to Pap Curtain, Skipper b'longs to Pap's sister, an' de yuther hoss is de plug whut Prince Total drives to his trash cart when he cleans up dis town. Now, kin you tell me which one of Pap's two hosses is de winner?"

Shin did not answer.

"I ain't bettin' on nothin' in de fourth race," Hitch rumbled, as he walked away. "I ain't got spry enough brains to foller Pap's tricks."

Time was passing and Shin realized that he must get some sort of action promptly. He turned toward the portion of the town occupied by the whites, and with renewed hope began to solicit loans from his white friends. After an hour of activity, running from place to place as busy as a bird dog, he was in possession of fifty cents, and had told about fifty different lies to get that much.

"Dar ain't but one mo' hope," he said, as he eyed with disgust the handful of nickels he had accumulated. "Dat hope is Skeeter Butts. Ef he don't see de light, den de night is done sottled down on me shore enough."

With eager steps he hastened to the Hen-Scratch saloon.

III

DEEP LAID PLANS.

Shin found Skeeter Butts sitting behind the bar in the Hen-Scratch saloon counting a roll of soiled and poisonous-looking money. The sight gladdened the eyes of the poverty-stricken negro.

"Skeeter," he exulted, "dat little wad of money shows dat you an' me is gwine to git rich."

"How come?" Skeeter asked. "You ain't got no claimance on dis wad."

"I'se got one real good tip."

"Explode it in my y-ear," Skeeter exclaimed eagerly.

"Pap Curtain say bet on Skipper."

Skeeter grinned, snickered, chuckled, laughed. He stood up, turned around, sat down again, and laughed louder.

"Ain't dat no good tip?" Shin asked.

"Yes, suh, dat's a dandy," Skeeter proclaimed. "All dat tip signifies to me is, don't lose no money on Skipper."

"You don't onderstan' 'bout dis, Skeeter," Shin said earnestly. "You see, I is about to marrify into Pap Curtain's fambly, an' he jes' passed me de news fer my own good."

"Who is you gwine take on?" Skeeter asked.

"Dat little charcoal blonde named Whiffle Boone," Shin told him. "An' dis Skipper hoss belongs to her maw."

"Huh," Skeeter grunted. "Mebbe dat's diffunt

an' mebbe not. How much change is you got to bet?"

"I ain't got none," Shin replied sadly. "I wants to borrer a leetle. I'll gib you a owe-bill agin' my eatin'-house ef you'll loant me some."

Skeeter weighed this for a minute, then said:

"Us'll fix it dis way, Shin: I'll loant you fifty dollars on yo' eatin'-house, pervided you'll let me handle de money an' manage de bets. I jes' nachelly hates to pass out money to anodder coon."

"Dat's all right, Skeeter," Shin declared, a burden lifted from his heart. "All I wants is a chance to win."

"I's gittin' ready to close up right now," Skeeter said, as he reached for his hat. "Us'll mosey out to de track togedder."

They entered the gate to find the grounds thronged with happy, eager, black faces, shiny with sweat. The band was playing, the peanut roasters were shrieking, and dozens of apron-clad, thunder-voiced negroes waved long-handled forks and howled like a wolf-pack. "Hot—hot—hot-dog!"

"Lawdy," Shin sighed. "My empty stomick is wropped aroun' my backbone like a wet dishrag aroun' a dryin'-pole. I feel like I ain't et fer fawty days!"

He promptly separated himself from Skeeter Butts and lost no time in finding Whiffle Boone.

"Is you had somepin to eat sence you got out here, Whiffle?" he asked eagerly.

"I ain't got nothin' but a smell of dem hot dogs," she smiled.

"Dis is whar we chews a few," Shin declared, as he led her away from the grandstand.

"Whut wus you so snippy about when I met you uptown?" Whiffle inquired as they consumed the sausage which Shin purchased with the money he had begged from the white folks of Tickfall.

"I wus figgerin' on how to git a bet down on a winnin' hoss, honey," Shin laughed. "It 'peared like I couldn't make de riffle, an' when I seed you I had on one of dese here grouches."

"Ain't it about time you wus bustin' de news?" Whiffle asked. "Cain't you tell me de name of de hoss?"

"No'm," Shin grinned. "I done promise I wouldn't say no words. But ef you wait fer me atter de races is over I'll take you to a real eatin'-house an' us'll celebrate our winnin's. We ain't fur from gittin' married now an' I's savin' somepin fer a surprise."

The gong sounded at the starter's shed, and Whiffle and Shin walked toward the grandstand, eating hot sausage as they went.

"Whut race is dis, Whiffle?" Shin inquired.

"Dis is de fourth," Whiffle told him. "My uncle Pap Curtain is got a couple hosses in dis race."

Shin Bone promptly lost his appetite.

"Lawd," he exclaimed. "I asked Skeeter Butts to put a few money on dis race fer me. I hope he is got time."

"Plenty time," Whiffle declared. "De ponies ain't come out on de track yit."

At that moment Shin saw Skeeter Butts sliding eel-like through a dense crowd without touching an elbow. A few minutes later he saw Skeeter again, talking earnestly to certain dressy, furtive persons, bearing every evidence of being visitors from New Orleans, and these men displayed tiny celluloid slates on which were penciled various fractions after the name of each horse.

Three horses galloped up the track and Shin looked them over carefully, concluding that the horse which carried his money was the only racehorse of the three. Trailer was a clumsy plowhorse; Doodlebug was a Tuckapoo mustang with an ugly temper; Skipper alone had the long, greyhound lines of the real racer.

"Whut hoss is you got yo' money on, Shin?" Whiffle asked.

"I bets on Skipper."

"My gosh!" the girl exclaimed, staring at him with big eyes. "Is you done loss all yo' good sense?"

"Pap Curtain tole me to bet on Skipper," Shin said defensively.

"Pap is like a mule, Shin," Whiffle said sadly. "He wucks bofe ways. You gotter look out fer surprises when you monkeys wid Pap."

The band stopped playing, the intense silence of the people was broken by the sound of pounding hoofs, and the horses swept under the wire.

"Go!" Vinegar Atts bellowed.

The blood pounded in the temples of Shin Bone, and he suddenly felt dizzy, almost delirious. Then he sat down, gasping like a landed fish. Doodlebug was three lengths ahead, running with the ease and regularity of a watch.

Skipper was dropping behind without even a symptom of a rally. At the half-mile post, Skipper was slowing up some more, showing weariness. Slower and slower he got in spite of the frantic efforts of his jockey to extract some speed from his mount's system.

Fairly stunned, Shin sat down and waited for the end. After what seemed to him an age or two, Doodlebug came under the wire, and a yellow, freckled-faced negro boy with an inadequate knowledge of spelling climbed a short ladder and inscribed upon a blackboard the names of the three horses in the order of their places in the race:

DUDDLEBUG
TRAYLOR
SKIPER

There was a little scattering applause, but the crowd could get up no enthusiasm for such an exhibition, and few had bet upon a race in which the tricky Pap Curtain had entered two horses.

Whiffle Boone turned and glared at Shin, who sat dazed and crumpled on the bench.

"Wus dat de news you wus gwine bust to me as a surprise, Shin?" she demanded sarcastically.

"Good-bye, honey," Shin said gloomily, as he

rose to his feet and staggered toward the exit. "I ain't in no mind to argufy about surprises now. I done got one myse'f."

"Whut 'bout dat supper we wus gwine hab?" Whiffle asked.

"Honey, I couldn't buy a sandsquich wid a bad dime," Shin told her tearfully. "I ain't got nothin' dat even looks like money."

IV

THE LAME SORREL.

Shin hunted all over the fair grounds for Skeeter Butts without being able to find him.

"I knows whut ails dat nigger," he said to himself, at last. "He's done gone back to de Hen-Scratch an' he's waitin' fer me to come. I ain't gwine! Dar ain't nothin' mo' fer me to win but a argumint. I done made dat nigger lose all his money an' if he gits me shet up in dat saloon, he'll kill me."

He walked out of the gate and went straight to the bank, knocking upon the door of the president's office.

A voice within answered, and Shin turned the knob and entered.

"Marse Tom," he began, "ain't you got no job fer a strong, willin' nigger?"

"Sure," Colonel Gaitskill said. "But I don't believe any nigger is willing to work while a free fair is going on out at the race-track."

"I done got enough fair, Marse Tom," Shin said solemnly. "I loves hosses, but I ain't wise to nothin' about 'em excusin' how to feed 'em, water 'em, an' rub 'em down."

"You wanted me to sell you a race-horse this morning," Gaitskill reminded him smilingly.

"Yes, suh. But you knowed I didn't had no money to pay fer no hoss," Shin grinned. "I wus jes' talkin' wid my mouf. But I shore would like to hab a job wuckin' wid hosses."

"All right," Gaitskill agreed. "Go out and potter around my stable. Three dollars a week and feed."

"Thank 'e, suh. Dat shore suits fine."

"And listen, Shin. Go out to the bayou pasture and bring in that pie-faced sorrel you wanted to buy. That's a good saddler. See if you can doctor him up some way and limber up that snake-bitten leg."

Shin had to pass along the road which led to the Hen-Scratch saloon on his way to the bayou pasture, but he took a wide detour when he came to that place of danger, walking through the fields until he came back to the road at a bend a half mile further on.

Slipping a bridle on the crippled horse, he leaped lightly upon his back, and rode toward the gate. The weeds grew rank and high in that rich bottom land, and multitudes of insects arose from the vegetation and whirled around the heads of the horse and his rider.

Suddenly a large grasshopper whirred up from

the weeds and flew past the sorrel's ear with a sharp, rattling, whining sound—"Zee-e-e-e."

With a snort of fright the horse sprang forward and ran like a rabbit all around the field, while Shin yelled and wrenched at the bridle, and begged the sorrel to "Whoa!"

In a few minutes the sorrel spilled Shin off and ran far back into the woods.

It was nearly dark when Shin captured him again and rode back to Tickfall. The long run had made the horse lame.

Passing the Hen-Scratch saloon, Shin tried to get a little more speed out of his steed, but the crippled brute merely groaned and limped on. Then right in front of the saloon an accident happened.

There was a new picket fence built around the yard of a home across the street from the saloon. A little negro boy ran down the street with a stick in his hand, and as he passed this fence, he laid his stick against the pickets, scraping it along as he ran. A horrible, rattling noise was the result.

At the first sound, Shin's pie-faced sorrel leaped into the air, threw Shin heavily to the ground, and ran snorting with fright toward the Gaitskill home with the speed of a deer.

A crowd quickly gathered around the prostrate Shin Bone, and he was picked up and carried into the Hen-Scratch saloon. A few minutes later, after sufficient liquor had been spilled down his throat and over his dusty clothes, Shin opened his eyes and gazed into the yellow, grinning face of Skeeter Butts.

"I figgered it wus about time you wus comin' here so us could divide up, Shin," Skeeter laughed. "But I's plum' sorry you got throwed off."

"I cain't divide up nothin'," Shin said sadly. "Of co'se I'll sottle my owe-bill wid you jes' as soon as I kin. I done got me a job wid Marse Tom. But I ain't got nary cent of money now."

"I 'speck you is got mo' dan you figger on," Skeeter laughed. "How much does you s'pose you winned on dat race?"

"I ain't winned nothin'," Shin declared. "Skipper lose."

"Shorely," Skeeter agreed. "I knowed he wus gwine do dat all along. So I bet yo' money an' my money on Doodlebug!"

"Bless gracious!" Shin howled, sitting up in the middle of the floor and gazing into the faces of the grinning negroes who stood in a ring about him. "How much did you rake down?"

"Yo' win is one hundred dollars," Skeeter declared exultantly. "But you owes me fifty an' I takes dat out of yo' win."

"Dat's right," Shin laughed. "Hand me over dem dollars."

He sat down at the table and counted the money laboriously, his manner becoming more and more elated as the dollars piled up under his hand. Then he slipped the wad into his pocket, and beamed upon the circle of admiring friends.

"Good luck done kotch me agin, niggers!" he laughed. Then he slipped behind the bar beside Skeeter, and said:

"Skeeter, you hab done me a large amount of great good."

"I don't deeserve no credick," Skeeter laughed. "I jes' happened to know Pap Curtain, an' besides dat, I done expe'unce dat little Tuckapoo mustang named Doodlebug befo'. I monkeyed wid dat pony one time, an' Skeeter wus a well skint sucker."

"Pap hadn't oughter did me dat way," Shin lamented.

"Pap cain't ack no diffunt," Skeeter told him. "Some niggers is like snakes. Dey gotter wiggle an' twist an' go crooked to git along."

"I shore wish I could gib Pap a twist dat he ain't lookin' fer," Shin declared.

Skeeter eyed him a moment with intense interest. Then he asked:

"Whut you gwine do wid dat money?"

"I'll ack like eve'y nigger—spend it!" Shin laughed.

"I figger on buyin' a race-hoss wid my win," Skeeter suggested. "How would dat plan suit you wid yo' money?"

"You reckin I could git a hoss whut'll beat Pap's Doodlebug?" Shin asked eagerly.

"Suttinly," Skeeter assured him. "Doodlebug ain't such a much hoss. Of co'se, he kin beat dese here old plow-hosses whut runs agin him. I knows de hoss whut kin beat him right now."

Shin pulled his roll of money out of his pocket and passed it back.

"Buy me dat hoss, Skeeter," he said earnestly.

"I don't want nothin' as bad as I want to git Pap Curtain's goat!"

V

NIGGER BLACKIE.

Shin Bone tended bar for Skeeter Butts until eleven o'clock that night, then Skeeter returned to the Hen-Scratch saloon, covered with swamp mud and leading a slim black horse.

"Dis is yo' winner, Shin," he said in weary tones, as he placed the lead-rope into the hands of the pop-eyed owner. "I got him for fifty dollars cash down, an' he's shore a dandy."

"He looks pretty peart," Shin grinned. "Kin he run?"

"Yep," Skeeter said in a disgusted tone. "He kin run like a log raff floatin' *up* de Massassap' River. But us ain't winnin' on his speed—us is bettin' on his looks."

"I don't ketch on 'bout dis," Shin said stupidly. "Dis sounds to me like you done waste my money."

"Don't go by sound, Shin," Skeeter snickered. "Go by looks. Now listen to dis few advices: you waste all de rest of dis night scourin' down dis hoss wid a currycomb, a brush, an' a rag. As soon as it is good day, you git out on de race-track an' lope dis hoss aroun' fer a while. Ef Pap Curtain is out on de track, you show him how good dis hoss kin pufform."

Shin walked away, mumbling to himself in his perplexity. But he took the horse to Gaitskill's stable and followed Skeeter's advice. After five or six hours of the most arduous labor, Shin lifted his lantern and surveyed the animal. He shone like a new silver dollar, every hair was in place, and the horse was beautiful.

"He shore is a looker," Shin proclaimed. "I hopes he's got some speed inside his black hide."

A little later, Shin rode him slowly out to the fairgrounds and entered the gate. It was just after daybreak, but early as it was, as Shin rode onto the track, he encountered Pap Curtain mounted on Doodlebug.

Without a word they started around in the same direction, each man watching the other's horse with great interest.

Shin broke from a canter into a swinging gallop, and Pap followed with Doodlebug. By the time they had gone half a mile and had pulled up, Pap knew all about the black horse.

"Did you buy dat hoss wid de money you winned on de fourth race yistiddy, Shin?" Pap asked with a sneering grin.

"Naw," Shin said shortly. "You tole me to bet on Skipper."

"Skipper skipped aroun' consid'able fast fer him," Pap chuckled. "Somebody must hab felt sorry fer you an' gib you dat hoss to win yo' losin's back wid."

"Dat's perzackly whut dey done," Shin replied.

"I'll take some of dat money back now ef you is willin' to try a private race."

"I ain't been made acquaintance wid dat hoss," Pap objected.

"Is you 'quainted wid ten dollars?" Shin asked in an ugly tone, as he pulled a bill from his pocket.

"Sho'ly, sho'ly," Pap proclaimed in unctuous tones. "Us'll ride back to'des de gran'stan' an' you kin han' dat money to de fust coon you meet. I'll put a ten on top of it."

Deep joy filled Pap's heart as he watched the black horse walking beside his own Tuckapoo mustang, the little racer which had never been beaten when Pap wanted him to win. Ten dollars was a great deal of money in Pap's mind, and easily won.

"You double criss-crossed me on dat race yistiddy, Pap," Shin said angrily. "You made out like I wus a member of de fambly an' you wus he'pin' me along. Whut you wus plannin' wus to rob me of all my loose change."

"How much did you drap, Shin?" Pap snickered.

"I drapped eve'y cent I bet on Skipper," Shin said non-committally.

"Ain't dat too bad!" Pap sighed mockingly. "You is gwine drap a few mo' change, too."

A moon-faced negro sat on the fence near the starter's stand, waiting for something to happen.

"Hold dis money, pardner!" Pap said, as he extended his hand with ten dollars. "Dis little Shin Bone wants to lose a bet!"

Shin dropped his bill into the eager stakeholder's hand, and turned his horse to ride a few feet up the track for a start. The moon-faced negro took his place under the starter's wire and the two horses loped down the track.

"Go!" the stakeholder whooped.

It was a pretty race for a quarter and the black was putting forth his best effort every foot of the way. Then Shin's horse seemed to lose all interest in the race and all other affairs of life and the utmost efforts of the rider availed only to bring the horse under the wire about fifty yards behind Doodlebug.

"Good-bye, po' little, las' little ten dollar bill!" Shin chanted tearfully as he loped tearfully on toward the stable leaving Pap Curtain to collect the stakes.

But Pap was not disposed to let Shin off so easily. He galloped after him and began:

"Whut race is you gwine start dat cow in, Shin?"

"He runs in eve'y race whut Doodlebug has, Pap," Shin said easily enough, but his heart was filled with chagrin. "I bought him to beat yo' Doodlebug!"

"Doodlebug is in de secont race to-day," Pap chuckled. "You shore owns a good-looker, but as a race-hoss dat shiny black is a puffeckly awful arrangement."

This was Shin Bone's idea exactly, and he rode out of the fairgrounds and hitched his horse in front of the Hen-Scratch saloon to hold an executive session with Skeeter Butts.

He strode into the saloon like a personified calamity, and dropped down in a chair beside the table where Skeeter sat.

"Skeeter," he howled, "you shore made a awful miscue about dat Nigger Blackie hoss you bought fer me. He's so nigh nothin' dat nobody cain't tell de diffunce betwix' him *an'* nothin'!"

"'Tain't so," Skeeter replied, continuing to count some money he had spread out on the table. "Dat's a dandy lookin' hoss."

"Suttinly," Shin retorted bitterly. "He's a looker, but he runs like a lan' tarrapin travelin' in a plowed field."

"Ain't it awful!" Skeeter snickered. "I'd druther try to win a race ridin' straddle of a mud scow whut I borrered outen de ribber dan to put up dat hoss fer a winner."

Shin grunted and relapsed into an outraged silence, looking at the unperturbed Skeeter now and then with glaring eyes. Finally Skeeter asked:

"Did you gib Nigger Blackie a tryout?"

"Yep. An' I loss de onlies' ten dollars I'm got in de worl' tryin' to beat Pap's Doodlebug."

"Dat's whut I loant you dat ten fer," Skeeter said, handing Shin ten dollars more from the pile on the table. "Ef you hadn't lost it, I'd 'a' fit you!"

"Huh," Shin grunted. "You ain't tellin' me as much as I oughter know."

"Naw, suh, not quite as much. You see, you's gwine marry into Pap's fambly, an' you's got one

of dese here open-work minds an' cain't keep nothin' secret."

"Dat ain't no reason why I don't want to rob Pap of all his dollars," Shin declared belligerently. "But I don't expeck to git much of Pap's money wis Nigger Blackie to run fer it."

"Mebbe you didn't know how to ride him, Shin," Skeeter suggested.

"'Taint dat, Skeeter," Bone said earnestly. "Dat hoss jes' nachelly ain't got no speed in him."

"I's heerd tell dat he had racin' blood in him," Skeeter replied.

"Mebbe so, he did had—one time," Shin responded gloomily. "But a stable flea bit him an' got it all."

Skeeter stood up and reached for his hat.

"I's glad to git dat repote from you, Shin," he said. "Now I wants you to tend dis bar fer me till I gits back. I's gwine ride Nigger Blackie aroun' a little an' see kin I limber up his racin' speed."

VI

BY THREE LENGTHS.

On the morning of the second day of the Tickfall Negro Fair, Colonel Tom Gaitskill, the chief promoter of the negro uplift movement, received a shock.

A delegation of wailing women waited upon him

and tearfully told their tale of woe. All the canned fruits and vegetables, all the preserves and jams, all the cakes and pies which they had brought to the Fair and entered in the competition for prizes had disappeared from the hall!

Investigation revealed the fact that the hungry negroes had helped themselves, sampling everything until nothing of the sample remained.

Half an hour later a delegation of negro farmers waited upon the Colonel and informed him that all their potatoes, cabbages, fruit, and home-raised peanuts, along with their sugar cane, corn, and hay had mysteriously disappeared from the display hall!

Investigation revealed the fact that those who had animals on exhibition on the grounds had looted and foraged, and found the supply insufficient for their needs.

A committee of howling negro girls waited upon Colonel Gaitskill and announced that all their plain and fancy sewing, their scarfs and handkerchiefs, their dresses and towels had disappeared!

Fowl raisers came to complain that their chickens, ducks, geese, and turkeys had vanished, some or all of them, and what could they do about it?

"By George!" Gaitskill exclaimed in exasperation. "These niggers don't have to be taught any uplift. They've lifted everything on the fairgrounds and made away with it."

Nothing was left on the grounds but the racehorses, and the Uplift Committee of white citizens of Tickfall decided to charge admission to the grounds for the last two days of the racing, and

by the money thus received reimburse the farmers and their wives and daughters for their losses. Thus peace and happiness were restored.

The afternoon was bright and fair and Pap Curtain was on the track early with a careful eye upon Doodlebug and upon all the other horses in Doodlebug's race, the second. He made a special inspection of Nigger Blackie as the jockey, Little Bit, rode him up the track for a warming. The black was as clumsy as a cow, and the diminutive darky rode him awkwardly and fearfully.

None of the ordinary rules and regulations were in force upon this race-track. A jockey could ride with any sort of saddle, or without one. The negroes had no uniforms, carried any sort of whips or spurs which they thought would get speed from their mounts. Only one rule was positively enforced, and that was made for this event: the man who entered a horse for a race must own the horse.

Pap was at the stable when Little Bit rode back, and he greeted the little jockey in a tone which already thrilled with anticipated victory.

"Don't bet no chink on dat sook-cow, Little Bit," he snickered. "Ef you got any loose change, buy yo'se'f a bernaner—don't waste it!"

Skeeter Butts overheard this remark and hastened forward.

"No jockey kin ride my hoss wid a bettin'-ticket in his hat, Pap," he said positively. "Ef you wants to lose yo' money, lemme take it away from you."

"I thought dis hoss b'longed to Shin Bone," Pap remarked.

"He do," Skeeter assured him. "Me an' Shin went cahoots, an' Shin exoncised dis hoss dis mawnin'."

"I remember 'bout dat," Pap chuckled, as he produced a roll of money from his pocket. "Less go down to de gramstan' an' git a stakeholder fer dese funds."

Skeeter took all the money which Pap would bet, then he walked to the betting shed where a howling mass of half-intoxicated negroes demonstrated an intense love for the improvement of stock.

Ten big, hoarse-voiced, fat-necked negro gamblers from New Orleans pushed and bellowed among the darkies with their little celluloid slates, taking bets for any amount on the favorite, Doodlebug.

Hitch Diamond, Prince Total, and Figger Bush closed in upon Skeeter Butts.

"I hear tell you is got a hoss in de nex' race, Skeeter," Hitch Diamond rumbled.

"Yes, suh, I's gibin' him a leetle tryout," Skeeter replied modestly. "Dis here race-hoss game is kinder new on me, an' I's jes' tryin' to break in easy-like. I buyed a race hoss yistiddy in Shongaloon from Tax Sambola."

"My Lawd!" Hitch exclaimed. "You ain't bettin' money on him, is yer?"

"Jes' a leetle to keep up my mind int'rusted," Skeeter grinned.

"I hopes it ain't no mo' dan you kin affode to

lose, Skeeter," Hitch Diamond said earnestly. "Dat Nigger Blackie hoss is de best looker in de worl', an' he ack like he's gittin' ready to go over de land like a air-ship. But he don't run no faster dan a sewin'-machine."

"Ain't it de truth!" Skeeter laughed mockingly. "I figger I better bet on his looks instid of his gait!"

Skeeter walked away and Hitch Diamond turned to his friends with eyes which glowed like a lion's.

"Sell yo' socks offen yo' foots an' bet yo' money on Doodlebug, niggers," he howled. "Skeeter Butts is done commit hisse'f enough to disavow dis Nigger Blackie hoss complete!"

When the bell rang for the second race, Skeeter Butts found Shin Bone in the grandstand, leaning against the rail.

"I got all our spondulix down, Shin," he grinned. "Bofe of us bets fifty dollars per each."

"How wus de odds?" Shin asked in a tone trembling with excitement.

"Some of it wus five to one," Skeeter replied. "All I bet Pap wus at dem odds."

"Dat'll bust him in about six minutes," Shin laughed. "By dark, he'll be cryin' in dat lace handkerchief he swiped outen de show-hall an' beggin' me to marrify his niece so he won't hab to suppote her no mo'."

Shin turned and gazed at the crowd, trying to locate his girl. Failing to find her, he left Skeeter without ceremony.

Nigger Blackie came in front of the grandstand,

loping along as sedately as a man might walk across a drawing-room. Little Bit, sitting on his back without a saddle was as nervous as a cat in the midst of a pack of popping fire-crackers.

"I bet ten to one dat Little Bit falls offen dat pony befo' he gits to de quarter pole," Pap proclaimed with a loud laugh.

"Ef Nigger Blackie runs in form, he ain't gwine git to no quarter pole onless Little Bit hauls him dar in a wheel-barrer," Hitch Diamond grinned.

"Dar's Doodlebug!" Pap proclaimed, in the tone of a parent speaking of a noble son.

Doodlebug was a Tuckapoo mustang. To those acquainted with the breed, enough said. It means that Doodlebug was a mean, tricky, biting, kicking, balky Indian pony. He came up the track sideways, backwards, on his hind feet, on his fore feet. Twice he lay down and rolled over, and once he balked, spending two minutes in a vain effort to bite off his jockey's leg.

"Dat hoss ain't got but one good p'int, Hitchie," Pap declared. "He kin run like a bullet shot outen a gun!"

A few minutes later five horses swept down the track in an even line.

"Go!" yelled Vinegar Atts, up in the judges' stand.

In the momentary silence following the get-away, there was a scream so loud and ear-splitting that it thrilled every person on the fair-grounds. Then everybody on the grandstand stood up and an astonished exclamation leaped from every lip:

"Look at Nigger Blackie!" "My Lawd, how dat hoss do run!"

Little Bit had a fence picket for a whip. But instead of using it in the ordinary way, he was violating all the customs of race-riding. He sat perfectly straight, his bridle-reins were untouched, lying upon the horse's neck and flapping loosely around his face, while he waved his fence picket around his head like a club. Nigger Blackie was running like a streak.

As Little Bit passed the half-mile post, once more that thrilling, ear-splitting shriek swept across the intervening space to the people who stood breathless in the grandstand.

"Whut kind of noise is dat Little Bit is makin' wid his mouf?" Pap Curtain inquired uneasily as he watched Doodlebug a full length behind Nigger Blackie, running his best and unable to gain an inch.

"Dat's a Indian war-whoop, Pap," Hitch Diamond said in a voice which choked in his throat. "When I wus jes' a little shaver, I used to hear de Caddo Indians yelp dat way when dey wus hoss-racin'."

"My Gawd!" Pap exclaimed, as the horses turned into the home-stretch. "Whut's done happened to Doodlebug?"

Doodlebug was doing his best, but he was two lengths behind, while Little Bit was riding Nigger Blackie like an Indian, whooping like a calliope, and Nigger Blackie, with the loose bridle-reins flapping around his face, was coming in like a rocket.

Somebody pulled at Pap's shoulder, and a soft voice spoke pleadingly in his ear. He struck behind him savagely with his clenched fist, and then leaned far over the fence.

Suddenly the grandstand broke out into a prayer, a wailing cry which urged, pleaded, implored!

"*Come* on, Doodlebug! *Come on, Doodlebug!* Come *on*, Doodlebug!"

"COME on, *Doodlebug!*" Pap shrieked, with tears in his eyes, and agony in his voice, and tragedy in his heart. "Oh, fer *Gawd*lemighty's sake, come on!"

Again some one pulled at Pap's arm, and a pleading voice spoke to him. Again Pap savagely shook himself loose, struck out blindly and insanely at the person behind him.

Then a mighty moaning sound broke from the grandstand, the lamentation of a crushed, disappointed, bankrupted multitude.

Nigger Blackie was under the wire, a winner by three lengths!

Pap Curtain turned away from the track, dazed, nauseated, his yellow cheeks streaked with white, his sneering lips hanging loosely and quivering, his mouth as dry as sawdust, his tongue feeling like it was as big and rough as a door-mat.

Once more some one pulled at Pap's shoulder, and a pleading voice spoke tearfully:

"Oh, Pap! I been lookin' fer you eve'ywhar! I was tryin' to kotch you an' tip you off!"

"Whut's dat?" Pap asked, turning his dazed, unseeing eyes upon the girl.

Whiffle Boone began to cry.

"I couldn't find you till atter de race begun, Pap," she sobbed. "I wanted to tell you dat Skeeter Butts an' Shin Bone swapped hosses on you."

"How's dat?" Pap asked, stupidly.

"Skeeter bought two black hosses yistiddy, Pap," Whiffle Boone said impatiently, mopping the tears from her face. "He got one from Tax Sambola at Shongaloon, but de hoss whut winned de race wus dat black hoss whut Indian Turtle owned—dat ole Indian whut lives on de Coolie bayo. Dat's how come Little Bit rid him jes' like a Indian!"

Pap leaned weakly against the fence and a deep moan issued from his stiff, parched lips.

"It's too late now, Whiffle," he sighed. "I done loss eve'y dollar I owns. I bet dat fifty dollars whut you gib me to keep fer you, an' I done lost dat. I done bet Doodlebug, an' lost him! I would hab loss Skipper, too, only but he b'longed to yo' maw instid of me!"

Whiffle suddenly broke out into a happy laugh.

"When do Skipper run again, Pap?" she inquired.

"He starts in de fifth race," Pap sighed.

"All right, Pap, don't cry!" Whiffle giggled. "Skipper will win in de fifth race—you leave dat to me!"

"'Twon't do no good, Whiffle," Pap moaned despairingly. "Us ain't got no money to bet."

"You leave dat to me, too," Whiffle replied

confidently. "You set down somewheres an' rest yo' mind an' pick up a brave heart. I'll git some money fer you to bet, an' I'll fry Skeeter Butts an' Shin Bone in deir own grease!"

VII

DOPE.

In the rear of the grandstand Skeeter Butts and Shin Bone were holding a jubilee. They were in possession of more money than they had ever imagined was in the world. Silver and currency caused every pocket to bulge, and for the first time in their lives they felt the need of police protection.

"I's skeart dese niggers will stick me up an' rob me of dis money, Skeeter," Shin said uneasily. "Wut is us gwine do wid it?"

"Bet it agin!" Skeeter exclaimed exultantly. "Pap Curtain is gwine run Skipper in de las' race. Dat means dat you an' me will go home wid all de money on de fairground."

"We ain't gwine git many bets," Shin grinned. "Dese here niggers ain't got much mo' money. Us is copped it all."

"Only three hosses starts in de fifth race, Shin," Skeeter remarked. "One is Prince Total's plow-hoss; one is Pap's Skipper, an' de yuther is a good runner called Peedee. Us bets on Peedee."

"All right," Shin agreed. "Less git busy. Nothin' don't bother me but my money."

"Less go somewhar an' 'vide up our money even!" Skeeter suggested. "Over by de pond would be a good hidin' place!"

As they started around the grandstand they met Pap and Whiffle Boone. Pap was walking with bent shoulders, and seemed to have aged forty years in a few minutes. Whiffle was leading him by the hand, and the dazed and broken negro was mumbling incoherently to himself. Whiffle looked straight at Shin Bone without a sign of recognition, and her eyes were like icicles.

"Dar now, Shin!" Skeeter exclaimed tragically. "You done busted Pap an' yo' love scrape, bofe at de same time."

"I ain't cryin'," Shin grinned easily. "Whiffle knows whar de money is at, an' she'll come back to little Shinny."

They watched Pap and the girl until they were swallowed up by the crowd, then Skeeter and Shin crossed the track and walked over to a pond in the rear of the judges' stand. They sat down on the edge of the water, divided their fortune, and happily planned their final raid on the money of their friends.

In the meantime Pap and Whiffle were standing at a stall looking into the face of a sleepy-eyed horse named Skipper.

"How much would you bet on Skipper, ef you had some money, Pap?" Whiffle wanted to know.

"Nothin'," Pap replied disgustedly.

Whiffle turned and caught Pap by the lapel of

his coat. She looked straight into his eyes and said:

"Pap, you listen to me: I win one hundred dollars in dat las' race by bettin' on Nigger Blackie. Dat shows dat I knows more about hoss-racin' dan you does. Now, you take dis money an' bet eve'y cent of it on Skipper, an' leave de rest to me—will you do dat?"

Pap's sagging backbone stiffened. His chin came up in the air. His air of disappointment and dejection vanished like magic, and his face assumed a broad smile.

"Gimme dat money, honey," he exulted. "I ain't mournin' de loss of my change. I hates to let Skeeter an' Shin bust me. Ef I kin jes' show 'em dat dey didn't git it all, I'll shore die happy."

"All right," Whiffle smiled. "Go ahead an' die. You hunt up Skeeter Butts an' Shin Bone an' bet 'em dis money—make 'em gib you ten to one on Skipper!"

When Pap departed, Whiffle made a circuit of the stables, eyeing each negro loafer with intense interest.

Finally she stopped and concentrated her attention on one darky who sat on top of the fence beside the track, a negro, the features of whose face seemed to have disintegrated and merged in a shapeless mass, as if the clay of which the face was molded had "run" before it was dry.

The negro saw Whiffle without appearing to look. Whiffle put up her hand and rubbed her nose. Instantly the man ran two fingers into his

ragged waistcoat pocket, brought them out, and waved them under his nose with a loud sniff.

Whiffle promptly stepped to the fence beside him, laid a fifty-cent piece upon the top rail, and whispered one word. The man acted as if he did not hear. Whiffle turned her back and looked off across the green surrounded by the race-track, and saw Skeeter Butts and Shin Bone leave the pond in the middle of the green and walk toward the betting-shed.

The negro climbed down from the fence and disappeared in the crowd. Whiffle kept her eyes on Skeeter and Shin until he had entirely disappeared. Then she turned, and where the money had been lying upon the fence there now rested a folded paper. Whiffle palmed this paper and walked slowly back to Skipper's stall.

Entering the stall, she closed the door, opened the paper and poked at the glistening crystals with the tip of her forefinger.

Skipper drew near and sniffed at her hands, begging for sweetmeats.

"Dis ain't no sugar, Skipper," she murmured, catching him by the nose. "Whoa! You'll make me spill dis med'cine, an' it costed me fifty cents! Whoa!"

She licked a few remaining crystals off of her trembling fingers, twisted the paper into a tiny wad and walked out of the stall.

"Huh!" she sighed as she wiped the bitter taste from her lips. "Ef Pap seed me lickin' dat he'd kill me!"

VIII

DISASTER.

Skeeter Butts and Shin Bone stood in the crowd at one of the entrances of the grandstand and frowned and sneered at the importunate negroes who crowded around them.

"Lend us jes' a dollar or two, Skeeter," they pleaded. "Ef we could git a leetle start, mebbe we could win some of our money back."

"I ain't loantin' no money," Skeeter proclaimed. "I's jes' bettin' money, an' I done bet all I'm got an' couldn't loant none ef I wanted to."

At that moment Pap Curtain joined the group, waving five twenty-dollar bills. He had wasted much time trying to locate Skeeter and Shin.

"Put up or shet up, Skeeter!" he howled gleefully. "Here am one hunderd dollars whut say dat Skipper wins dis race."

"Bless gracious, Pap," Skeeter grinned. "I figgered dat I had you bust. Ef I'd 'a' knowed you had a single dollar lef' I'd shore been to see you. Now I done bet all I'm got."

"Put up de Hen-Scratch saloon!" Pap taunted. "I'll bet you on anything you is got."

"I got a race-hoss," Skeeter grinned. "I'll bet Nigger Blackie agin fifty dollars dat Skipper don't win."

"I takes it," Pap said promptly.

"I'm got a Nigger Blackie race-hoss, too, Pap,"

Shin Bone suggested with a loud laugh. "You seed me on him dis mawnin'."

"I bets you ten dollars agin *yo'* race-hoss," Pap said promptly.

"I takes it," Shin snickered.

Pap turned away with forty dollars, and found no trouble in placing it on Skipper, with odds against his horse of ten to one.

It was the last race of the day, and business was brisk. The losers were squealing and begging money, hoping for a chance to repair their fortunes. The winners were whooping and resorting to every means in their power to push their luck to the limit and add to their loot.

"Hurry up, niggers!" one of the bloated, dressy coons from the city whooped. "Git yo' money on de race! Dey's saddlin' up! Ef you wants to git in on dis spec'lation now is de las' an' loudest call fer yo' money! Git busy!"

"Put yo' las' dollar on de las' race an' don't cry ef you bets it on de hoss dat comes in las', niggers!" another darky bawled as he waved a handful of money. "You'll be shore to git yo' money's wuth of dis race, fer dese three hayburners cain't lope aroun' dat track befo' sundown!"

"Listen, Shin!" Skeeter said as he plucked at his friend's sleeve. "I 'speck we better hunt up dat Whiffle Boone an' make frien's wid her over agin. 'Tain't no use to bear her no grudge—us is winners!"

"Lawd, I done fergot dat sweet little gal offen my mind!" Shin exclaimed as he hastened with Skeeter

into the crowded grandstand and pushed through the sweating multitude in his search for his girl.

"Dar she am!" Skeeter said, pointing. "You go up an' set on one side of her, an' I'll set on de yuther side, an' us'll jolly her up!"

To their surprise, they found Whiffle as jolly already as she could possibly be. She made room for them, sat down between them and began to talk like the whirr of a flutter-mill.

The bell rang for the fifth race, and the three horses galloped up the track in front of the grandstand. Skeeter noticed that Skipper's jockey was having the time of his life trying to keep his mount on the track. The animal acted like he had an insane desire to walk the fence, climb into the grandstand, or slide on his ear.

"Somebody is done hit dat Skipper over de head wid somepin an' sot him crazy," Skeeter commented.

"Don't you slanderize Skipper now!" Whiffle warned him. "Dat hoss b'longs to my maw."

"He's a good hoss all right," Skeeter said propitiatingly. "But of co'se he ain't whut you mought call a race-hoss."

"Oh, *ain't* he?" Whiffle sniffed. "He wus a race-hoss when we bought him, an' I bet I knows mo' about race-hossin' dan you do!"

There was a loud whoop from the crowd and Skeeter Butts raised himself on tiptoe and looked with popping eyeballs.

"Bless *gracious*, whut a git-off!" Whiffle exclaimed.

It was indeed a very bad start. In a few moments the three horses were strung over a distance of a hundred yards, but well to the front and all alone a big gray named Skipper was skimming the rail and running like a wild fox, while Skeeter's favorite bet, Peedee, was the last in the line.

"O Lawdy!" Skeeter sighed, his heart bumping against the base of his tongue. "Dis is awful, puffeckly awful!"

He sat down heavily and closed his eyes.

Shin Bone took one look and vanished.

Whiffle Boone stood without a tremor of excitement watching her horse.

"Run, you gray houn' dawg, run!" she whooped in a clear, bugle call.

At the head of the stretch Skipper was far ahead, running like a high-powered automobile.

He passed under the wire and started around the track again. In spite of the frantic efforts of his jockey to stop him Skipper made the second mile in record time.

As he passed the grandstand the negro who operated the big bass drum brought down the drumstick on the stretched pigskin with a loud "Boom!"

Skipper promptly jumped the fence, ran far over in the field, bucked his jockey off, ran splashing through the little artificial pond in the middle of the green, and finally lay down in the water and rolled over and over like a muskrat, kicking and squealing and splashing the water and making waves like Pharaoh's army drowning in the sea!

"Lawdymussy!" Whiffle whined, watching the

antics of the crazed horse and wringing her hands in nervous distress. "I knowed Skipper was a hop-hoss, but I didn't ax nobody how much tea to gib him. I figger dat I doped Skipper too high!"

The crowd was on its way home a long time before they rescued Skipper from the pond and persuaded the mud-begrimed winner to return to his stall and be cleaned off.

At the head of the homeward-bound procession walked Skeeter Butts and Shin Bone. Words cannot describe their distress.

"Dis is a sad an' sorrerful day fer me, Shin," Skeeter wept. "At de eend of de secont race I owned all de money in de worl'. But now——"

"Hush, Skeeter!" Shin said impatiently. "Yo' mouf is jes' like a gramophome—you sets it runnin' an' goes off an' leaves it."

"All right," Skeeter snarled. "I'll shet up. But fust I tells you dis, solemn an' specific: I ain't never gwine bet on nothin' no more! Dis here expe'unce is done broke me from suckin' eggs!"

"Hush, Skeeter!" Shin pleaded. "Lemme medjertate!"

IX

ONE DOLLAR, ONE CENT, ONE WORM.

Next morning, as Shin busied himself about the stable of Colonel Tom Gaitskill, he was in the depths of despair. The day before had been one of wild betting, of wonderful winnings, and of most

disastrous and heartbreaking losses. And this was the last day of the fair, and Shin found himself in a condition where there was no possibility of recovering even a part of his lost fortune.

One by one he brought out Gaitskill's handsome horses and cleaned them until a man might rub a silk handkerchief over their shiny coats and not pick up a speck of dust.

Finally Shin brought out the beautiful sorrel with the blazed face and the stiff, snake-bitten leg. The animal was painfully lame, and Shin spent an hour with various remedies striving to get some of the rigidity out of the wounded leg.

Colonel Tom Gaitskill sauntered out from his house to the stables, carrying his morning newspaper in his hand.

"Mawnin,' Kunnel!" Shin exclaimed. "Dis old rattlesnake hoss is shore disencouragin'. It 'pears like his leg ain't limberin' up a-tall!"

"Is that so?" Gaitskill asked, slapping at the gnats which flew annoyingly close to his face with the newspaper and making a shrill, rattling sound.

Instantly the horse gave a loud snort, leaped high into the air, broke the halter rope with which he was tied to the post, sprang awkwardly across the lot, and stood in the corner of the fence, looking fearfully around him and blowing the air with a whistling sound through his nostrils.

"What in the name of mud is the matter with that fool?" Gaitskill demanded.

"Dat hoss is done expe'unce a rattlesnake, Marse Tom, an' dat rattlin' newspaper skeart

him" Shin Bone grinned. "When dat hoss hears somepin rattle he don't take no time to study—he hikes!"

Shin walked over and led the trembling animal back to the post. Gaitskill said with deep regret:

"My fine horse is ruined, Shin. If he should recover from that stiff leg he would always be unreliable."

"Dat's a fack, Marse Tom," Shin agreed. "Nothin' cain't never make no rattlin' sound aroun' him. I done expe'unce dat myse'f—he throwed me off two times an' nigh fractioned my neck."

"I don't know what to do with him now," Gaitskill said sadly.

"Sell him to me, Marse Tom!" Shin pleaded. "Me an' Whiffle Boone is gwine git married an' start a eatin'-house, an' ef I could own dis hoss an' a little wagon I could make plenty money wid light haulin'."

Gaitskill pondered this a moment. Then he said:

"I'll let you have him for forty dollars, Shin."

"Suttinly, Marse Tom. I'll take him!"

"But remember this: you must promise to turn that horse into my pasture every night, so he can get enough to eat. I won't have you starve him."

"A nigger don't starve his own hoss, Kunnel," Shin Bone laughed. "A nigger will steal feed fer his own hoss, but he won't steal fer a white man's hoss."

Gaitskill smiled and turned away. Shin gazed

upon Rattlesnake with the proud eyes of an owner. He put his arms around the animal's slim, graceful neck, drew the shapely head down upon his bosom, and said:

"Cripple hoss, ef I jes' had a live rattlesnake to tie to yo' tail, I figger I could go out on de race-track dis day an' win all de races whut is!"

Suddenly he straightened up, released the horse's head and turned away with an air of deep dejection.

"Shucks!" he growled. "Marse Tom specify I got to pay him fawty dollars fer dis hoss! Whar kin I git dat money?"

Shin led the horse back to the stall and sat down on a broken chair in the runway. Twenty minutes of deep cogitation threw no light upon his financial problem, so he rose with a sigh and idly ran his hands through his empty pockets.

Suddenly he thought of the breast pocket of his coat.

Hastily he thrust his hand into that pocket and brought out one silver dollar and one copper cent. Up to that moment he had forgotten this money since he placed it there three days before.

"Dis two money fotch me luck one time," he sighed. "Mebbe I could git a little lift from 'em agin ef Skeeter Butts hadn't took cold foots an' announce his specify dat he warn't gwine race no mo'."

He walked out of the stable, stopped beside a big pine stump in the stable yard, laid his dollar on top of the stump and placed the copper penny on

top of the dollar in as nearly the exact center as he could calculate.

Then he lifted up some planks which lay deeply buried in the dirt in the corner of the yard and captured two red earthworms. He took one of these worms and laid it in the exact center of the copper coin.

"Now, Mr. Worm," Shin commanded, "you crawl offen dat cent and specify to me whut direction to go to git some money! Gimme a sign!"

The worm started to crawl off. In his progress his head touched the silver dollar. The worm stopped and promptly crawled back upon the copper. He started again in another direction, but the moment its body touched the silver dollar the worm drew back.

"Huh!" Shin grunted. "Dis worm is igernunt —he don't know which way to go!"

Shin watched him with intense curiosity. He picked up a straw and gave him little pushes to assist his progress, then he suddenly took a breath which threatened to suck in all the air in the stable-yard.

"Bless Gawd!" he exclaimed with heartfelt gratitude. 'It's a shore, certain fack!"

He tossed the worm aside, pocketed the money and made a beeline to the Hen-Scratch saloon.

That popular resort was crowded with the colored inhabitants of Tickfall. They raved and bellowed and drank and laughed and rattled the money in their pockets and discussed the races of the day.

Shin entered quietly, and after a few minutes he picked up a table and set it in the middle of the room, placing a chair beside it. Seating himself with great ceremony, he put his silver dollar in the center of the table and placed his copper cent on top of the dollar.

The noise of talking and laughing ceased and the negroes crowded around Shin Bone.

Like all negroes, Shin had a dramatic gift, and he played it to the limit. His actions were attended by no explanations and had an air of deep mystery. Then he spoke:

"Whut nigger in dis house is got a fishin' worm?"

There was a long, astonished silence. Finally Pap Curtain spoke:

"Whut you want wid a fishin' worm, Shinny? Want to eat yo' breakfust?"

"Naw, suh," Shin proclaimed. "I's gwine make a bet."

"Whut does you bet?" Hitch Diamond bellowed.

Shin Bone rose to his feet. Pointing dramatically at the money, he shouted:

"I bets any money dat I kin put a fishin' worm on top of dat copper cent, an' dat worm will starve an' squinch up an' die, befo' he will crawl across dat silver dollar an' git away!"

This announcement was followed by intense silence. Finally Pap Curtain remarked:

"Dat's some kind of trick dollar."

"'Tain't so!" Shin howled.

"How much will you bet?" Hitch Diamond wanted to know.

"Any money!"

"Will you lemme furnish my own dollar?" Pap Curtain inquired.

"Suttinly!"

"Will you lemme furnish de copper cent?" Hitch Diamond bellowed.

"Shorely!"

"Will you lemme furnish de fishin' worm?" Prince Total squealed.

"Yep!"

"Lawd, niggers!" Hitch Diamond roared. "Shin Bone is done gone cripple under de hat! Less bust him!"

Shin Bone pocketed his dollar and his copper and sat down at the table. There was a wild flurry as Prince Total pushed through the crowd to go out and dig an earth-worm. Hitch Diamond sat down in the middle of the sand-covered bar-room floor, laid a copper cent down, placed an immense middle finger upon it and began to scour it up and down until the penny shone like new. Pap Curtain dropped a silver dollar upon the floor, placed his boot upon it and scraped it up and down in the sand. When he placed it upon the table it looked like a new-minted dollar.

A moment later Prince Total appeared with a fat red earth-worm.

"Put yo' money on de table, niggers," Shin Bone announced as he rose to his feet. "I takes eve'y bet up to fo' hunderd dollars. I bought a

eatin'-house from Marse Tom Gaitskill fer fo' hunderd dollars, an' dat house covers all my bets!"

"I keeps de books!" Skeeter Butts squealed, flourishing a pencil and a sheet of paper. "Bellow yo' bets in a loud voice!"

"Pap Curtain, twenty dollars!" Pap proclaimed.

"Hitch Diamond, twenty!"

"Prince Total, twenty!"

"Figger Bush, twenty!"

All of this was perfectly familiar to the negroes for this reason: in the negro churches when a collection is taken up a table is placed, a secretary is appointed, and each donor marches to the front of the congregation, places his gift upon the table, announces the amount in a loud voice and retires.

In ten minutes the table contained a goodly amount of currency and silver, and Shin Bone swept the contribution from the top of the table into his hat.

"Two hundred an' fo' dollars is bet, niggers!" Shin announced. "Now, Prince Total, advance an' produce de worm!"

Pap Curtain laid his shiny silver dollar in the center of the table. Hitch Diamond placed his shiny copper cent in the center of the dollar. Prince Total placed his fat, shiny, squirmy earthworm in the center of the cent.

Shin Bone walked over close to the exit, climbed upon the end of the bar so he could see by looking over the heads of the negroes, and began to pocket the money contained in his hat.

There was the most intense and overwhelming

silence as the crowd watched the worm. It started off the cent, but it never stayed off. The penny was small and the worm was large, and sometimes it overflowed and touched the silver. When that happened the worm displayed the most intense discomfort, and the most eager desire to readjust its folds and scramble back upon the copper.

A loud groan arose from the watching negroes.

Shin Bone stood up on the end of the bar and squealed:

"Good-bye, niggers! Ef dat worm ever gits offen dat copper cent I'll pay de money back an' eat de worm raw!"

He turned and walked out of the saloon a happy and wealthy man!

Ten minutes later Pap Curtain, Hitch Diamond, and Prince Total appeared at the home of Colonel Tom Gaitskill.

"Kunnel," Hitch said earnestly, "us niggers wants to show you somepin an' ax you how come!"

"What is it?" Gaitskill smiled.

Pap laid a silver dollar on the floor of the porch, Hitch Diamond placed a copper cent on top of it, and Prince Total laid a worm on top of the cent.

"Now, Kunnel, fer Gawd's sake, tell us how come dat worm cain't crawl offen dat cent?"

Gaitskill laughed.

"That is a simple demonstration in experimental electricity, men," he said. "When the worm's damp body which is in contact with the copper touches the silver it starts a current of electricity

that gives it a shock. Of course the current thus produced is very slight, but it is quite enough for the worm, and the worm finds it more comfortable to stay on the copper coin."

"Dat shore is a strange an' expensive fack, Marse Tom," Hitch Diamond remarked gloomily.

"De nigger whut bets his dollars on dat exper'ment ain't gwine git no slight shock," Pap Curtain declared.

"An' he ain't gwine hab even a copper cent to stan' on!" Prince Total concluded.

X

RATTLESNAKE.

All of Shin Bone's victims were sitting in the grandstand when Shin rode on the track that afternoon to exhibit his newly purchased horse.

"Hello, Shinny!" Hitch Diamond yelled. "Whar you git dat plug?"

"Marse Tom sold him to me fer fawty dollars," Shin grinned. "You all he'ped me to pay fer him when you bit like suckers at dat fishin' worm!"

"Is you gwine race him?" Pap whooped.

"Suttinly. He goes in de las' race."

"Is you gwine bet on him?" Prince Total squealed.

"I bets eve'y cent I'm got," Shin grinned. "Dis hoss's name is Rattlesnake, an' he's pure p'ison."

Shin trotted his horse down the track, and the

negroes watched the stiff hind leg of the animal and noticed that the horse never raised it far enough above the ground to prevent it making a long mark upon the turf. Shin galloped back in front of his friends, and the crippled horse awkwardly dragged his stiff leg, making a longer and deeper mark upon the track.

"I wonder ef dat nigger really means whut he say?" Pap remarked as he sat back in his seat.

"Whut race is you in, Pap?" Hitch Diamond asked.

"I starts Nigger Blackie in de las' race," Pap told him. "I bet Doodlebug yistiddy an' lost him, but I speck he's gwine in dat race, too. Of co'se Nigger Blackie kin beat Doodlebug—he done it yistiddy."

"I thought Nigger Blackie b'longed to Skeeter Butts," Hitch said.

"Naw, suh. I winned Nigger offen Skeeter yistiddy."

"How many hosses in dat las' race?" Prince Total asked.

"Gawd knows," Pap sighed. "It's de las' race of de fair. It's a free-fer-all scramble, an' eve'y nigger in dis parish kin git in wid a race-hoss ef he wants to."

"I tells you whut, niggers," Hitch Diamond suggested. "Shin Bone is done robbed us of a heap of money; now less go down an' bet agin him an' his hoss an' rob him of all de chink he's got. Dat stiff-leg Rattlesnake cain't run—any hoss kin beat him as fur as you kin shoot a gun."

"I favors dat!" Pap exclaimed. "Dis is de las' race of de las' day of de fair. I favors makin' it de las' of Shin Bone. I's done got plum' nauseated wid dat nigger anyhow."

They waited on Shin in a body and proposed to take all his money away from him.

"I bets dollar fer dollar, niggers," Shin replied smilingly. "I is got one hunderd an' sixty dollars, an' I lets it go easy."

"Who holds de stakes?" Pap Curtain asked.

"I dunno," Shin answered. "I ain't figgered on dat."

"How will Whiffle Boone suit?" Pap inquired:

"She suits," Shin said indifferently. "Less hunt her up."

They found Whiffle in the grandstand and explained what they wanted her to do. She gladly consented and accepted their money, keeping a record of the amount of their bets.

When the men left her Whiffle sat for a long time in deep meditation, then she started on a search for Shin Bone.

Shin was busy at the stable plaiting Rattlesnake's mane and tail into long, hard braids, a half dozen on the mane and as many on the tail. He was working eagerly, confidently, with the manner of a man who knew what he was doing.

"Shinny," Whiffle asked, "who is gwine ride yo' hoss?

"I'm is."

"Is you shore you is gwine win, Shin?"

"Suttinly."

"I don't see how dat cripple hoss kin run," Whiffle remarked in troubled tones.

"It do 'pear like dat stiff leg hinders him some," Shin grinned. "But I done found out somepin 'bout dis hoss: he ain't skeart of nothin' but a rattlesnake."

"Dat discover don't make him run no faster," Whiffle replied.

"No'm. But ef I was to tie a rattlesnake to his tail I 'speck he would run some."

"Huh!" Whiffle snorted disgustedly. "You ain't gwine tie no snake to dat hoss's tail."

"Dat's a fack," Shin snickered. "I's skeart of snakes. But I tells you dis honest, Whiffle: ef you got any money to bet, you bet it on Rattlesnake. I wouldn't tell you dis ef I didn't love you more'n anybody!"

"I owns one hunderd dollars, Shin. Me an' Pap winned in de race whut busted you up yistiddy. I's gwine bet on Rattlesnake fer yo' sake, because I loves you."

It seemed a long time to Shin Bone before the last race. A good hour before that contest of speed Shin had Rattlesnake saddled and waiting.

When at last the bell rang for the final racing event of the fair Shin mounted his stiff-legged steed and rode slowly out upon the track. He counted and found that fifteen other horses were entered, the only formidable rivals to Rattlesnake being Doodlebug and Nigger Blackie.

There are various methods in use among horsemen to extract speed from their race-horses.

Sometimes a jockey carries an electric battery in one of his riding boots, and the battery is connected with copper wire to his spurs; sometimes the battery is hidden in the saddle and the saddle is stitched and lined with copper wire; sometimes the battery is concealed in the butt end of the riding whip. These methods often lead to the detection of dishonesty. A better way is to carry a hand buzzer and apply the juice until the race is won; then the jockey can toss the hand buzzer over the fence and defy the inspection of the judges. Sometimes a groom or rubber pours a bottle of liquid called "High Life" over the horse's back, or administers a dose of dope; in that case the jockey has the struggle of his life to prevent his horse from climbing into the judges' stand before he can get a start.

But Shin Bone pulled the most unique stunt ever attempted on a race-track.

The best speed extractor in the world for white flesh, colored flesh, or horse flesh is Fright. Fear will make a lame man walk, a crippled horse run, and a paralyzed negro sprout wings and fly.

Shin rode Rattlesnake without spurs, or whip, or dope, or high life, or electricity. All in the world that he had to induce his horse to run was a handful of toy baby rattles which he had swiped from the nursery of Colonel Tom Gaitskill's grandchild. Woven in Rattlesnake's plaited mane were half a dozen celluloid balls, containing two or three buckshot each and marks outside of a baby's tiny teeth.

As Rattlesnake stumped about on his stiff leg they made no disturbing sound; but Shin had learned by experiment that a little burst of speed started the rattling, and the big horse did the rest!

The fifteen horses trotted down toward the starter's stand in a pretty fair alignment. Vinegar Atts, the starter, was tired of his week's work and easy to please.

"Go!" he whooped.

Rattlesnake broke into an awkward gallop. Then Shin Bone reached back and pulled a string in the rear of his saddle.

Four noisy celluloid baby rattles, each suspended from a strong string, dropped down around the legs of Rattlesnake.

The horse heard that deadly, venomous rattle, and felt something touch his flanks and drop further and tap him on the legs; right behind his ears he heard a dreadful whirring sound, as if a snake were entwined in his mane!

He uttered a scream so shrill, so horrible, that every negro in the grandstand shuddered.

Then he leaped forward, and the pop-eyed negroes had never seen such running in their lives!

Rattlesnake's body lay out in a level line, nose, shoulder, back, and his flying legs were a yellow blur beneath his straining body. But not all the thunder of his going could deaden the sound of that fearful rattle, which whirred like the wind in his ears, stirring the remembrance of suffering and sickness and the agony of the cauterizing iron!

Faster, faster, faster Rattlesnake ran, his feet spurning the brown carpet of turf beneath him, his crippled hind leg limbering up for the last time in his life and shooting his body forward like the piston rod of an engine.

The race was won in an incredible time.

As the terrified horse shot under the wire Shin reached behind his saddle and tore loose the cords which held the rattles flapping around the animal's flanks; then he ran his hands through the plaited mane and pulled off the rattles which whirred behind Rattlesnake's ears, and the horse slowly slackened his speed and stopped, his sides heaving, his breath coming and going like a giant bellows.

When the other horses came in Shin rode slowly back and held up his hand.

"Judges?" he called.

Vinegar Atts nodded his head and waved his hand toward the stable.

When Shin Bone dismounted at the stall Whiffle Boone ran forward with the tears running down her laughing face.

She jerked Shin's hat from his head, turned it upside down on the ground and filled it with money. Then she threw her arms around the graceful, throbbing, sweating neck of the big sorrel horse.

"We win!" she sobbed. "Bless Gawd! We win!"

All this happened three years ago, and there has never been another race at any Tickfall Negro Fair.

For three years Shin Bone's wife has been in charge of the restaurant which she bought with her winnings in the last great race. For three years Shin Bone has met every train with a light wagon drawn by a pie-faced, stiff-legged sorrel horse. His owner "wrastles trunks an' gripsacks fer de white folks." His horse is as fat as butter, but he runs away every time he hears a rattling sound.

Last fall Shin and Whiffle drove Rattlesnake out to the fairground and entered a two-year-old negro boy in the Better Babies' contest. Colonel Tom Gaitskill had offered handsome prizes in this contest and was in charge.

"This is your son, Shin?" Gaitskill smiled as he entered the piccaninny's name and age in a large book.

"Yes, suh."

"I presume it is a eugenic, hygienic baby?" Gaitskill laughed.

"Yes, suh," Shin replied, wondering at the same time what Gaitskill meant. "Yes, suh. He gits de you-jeans from his maw an' de high-jeans from his paw. He's a shore winner!"

Hoodoo Face.

I

THE STRANGER.

DINNER GAZE bore the air of a man who was perfectly satisfied with his personal appearance and sure of making a good impression upon all who beheld him.

He leaned back in his seat in the negro coach of the New Orleans accommodation, using the seat in front of him as a footstool. His legs were crossed with a display of glorious silk hosiery, his thumbs were anchored in the armholes of his gold and purple vest, his bright green cravat contained a bright yellow diamond, and his cigarette-stained fingers beat a happy tattoo upon the bosom of his shirt.

The face of Dinner Gaze was black, and as expressionless as the ugly mug of a dough man. There was a long mark upon his cheek where a bullet had missed the center of his face about two inches. There was a long knife-scar on the back and side of his neck. A bit of the upper part of his left ear was missing, sliced off smoothly with

a sharp knife or razor. The end of one of his front teeth was broken off. His eyes were as steady and unwinking and shiny as two glass beads, his voice was low and soft and confidential in tone, and his heavy lips carried an habitual sneer.

Hitch Diamond, who sat beside him, was similarly satisfied.

Hitch's appearance cried aloud his profession of pugilist. His face was a scarred ruin, battered and bruised in many a fistic battle until it resembled the face of the Sphinx since it has been pecked at and damaged by the souvenir hunters and sandstorms of the centuries. His ponderous hands looked like the gnarled and twisted roots of a scrub-oak tree, while his legs were like the Corinthian columns supporting the portico of a temple.

Hitch had made a trip to New Orleans for pugilistic purposes. At the end of the second round, Hitch had looked down at his opponent, then waved his gloved fist at the whooping crowd and remarked: "I know whut I done to dat coon! He's gwine sleep a long time!" After which Hitch had collected a hatful of money and remained in New Orleans long enough to get it all nicely spent except a puny wad in one pocket of his shiny new pantaloons.

Every rag of clothes on Hitch's giant body was entirely new. He was swathed in a Prince Albert coat, choked and tortured by a high collar and a stiff-bosomed shirt; a glorious silk hat, all white silk lining on the inside, and smooth, shiny,

imitation beaver on the outside, rode on his head; while on his feet were a pair of patent-leather shoes which had caused him a world of trouble in the city.

He had walked for miles, in and out of the stores, seeking a pair of shiny shoes which would fit his immense feet. Shoe clerks had taken one look at those pedal extremities and had thrown up their hands in despair. But Hitch had persisted in his search, and now it was plainly apparent to all that Solomon in all his glory was not shod like such as he.

Dinner Gaze was listening with great interest to Hitch's talk.

"I ain't went to N'Awleens befo' fer mighty nigh five year," said Hitch as he extracted a long Perique stogie from the side-pocket of his gorgeous yellow waistcoat.

Dinner Gaze reached out, took the stogie from Hitch's giant hand, and tossed it out of the window. He handed the pugilist a big, fat cigar with a broad gold band, and grinned in a friendly way. Then he said in his low, gentle voice:

"Ef you wants me to set by you, don't smoke no roll of rags an' garbage. Take a real seegar!"

"Thank 'e, suh," Hitch murmured gratefully, removing the gold band and fitting it carefully upon his little finger where he admired it as a maiden admires her engagement ring. "I's powerful sorry dar ain't no lady folks in dis car to see me smoke dis. I ain't never feel like I had enough money to ack liberal an' buy real smokes."

"Ain't you spek dat you got a wad to tote home from de city wid you?" Gaze inquired carelessly, as he tore a page from a newspaper and began idly to roll it tightly.

"Shore!" Hitch chuckled. "I totes it in my behime hip-pocket next to my heart, whar unpious niggers totes dey gun. But most of dat is jes' show money—'tain't much, an' I got it wropped up in a roll to make it look like a plenty. Fawty dollars is all whut is lef' of my trip to de city—excusin' de mem'ry of a dam' good time, an' dese clothes!"

"Whar you gwine now?" Dinner asked as he fumbled with his paper.

"I's gittin' off at Sawtown," Hitch replied. "I been livin' aroun' in dis part of de worl' all my life, an' I ain't never seed dat big saw-mill town yit. 'Tain't been but 'bout fo' year ago dat Sawtown started off—when dey sot dat big mill dar in de woods."

"I's proud I met up wid you, Revun," Dinner Gaze said. "I lives in Sawtown, an' I'll show you all de good p'ints in de place."

Hitch opened his mouth to deny that he was a preacher, but the negro's natural love of the game of make-believe prevented him. His slow mind evolved the humor of the situation, and he bestowed a pious smile upon the man beside him.

"Thank 'e, suh. I ain't gwine let nothin' git past me. I's gwine to all de shows, an' drink all de ice-water I kin git, an' chaw peanuts, an' git right in de middle of de cullud high life."

"Dat picayune way of seein' Sawtown won't git

you nothin'," Dinner Gaze grunted disgustedly. "Bust her wide open, Revun!"

"How is dat did?" Hitch wanted to know.

"I'll show you!" Gaze told him.

"Whut job does you wuck at in Sawtown?" Hitch asked.

"I'm gittin' ready to sot up a little nigger gamblin'-house in Sawtown now," Dinner replied cautiously, after a moment's hesitation. "Befo' dat, I managed a string of nigger prize-fighters in N'Awleens."

Hitch raised his battered head like an old, scarred war-horse when he hears the bugle-call for charge. Then he remembered that Gaze thought he was talking to a clergyman.

"Dat shore sounds familious to me," Hitch laughed. "I used to be a prize-fighter my own se'f!"

"Hear dat, now!" Dinner Gaze exclaimed. "I knowed you an' me wus kinnery when I fust cotch you wid my eye. How come you left de great perfesh?"

"A nigger put a chunk of lead in his glove an' battered me clean acrost a wharf-boat," Hitch narrated, drawing upon his imagination, and recalling an incident in the career of his friend, the Reverend Vinegar Atts. "Atter dat I felt a call to preach."

"Mebbe you could come back," Gaze suggested.

"Naw, suh," Hitch grinned, quoting a remark he had heard Vinegar make. "Preachin' is a plum' sight safer. I kin git up befo' a lot of

Christyums an' knock noses an' pull hair an' skin shins all I'm got a mind to, an' all dey kin do is to turn aroun' de yuther cheek. Ef dey hits back, dey ain't pious!"

The odor of wet, sawed, sun-scorched lumber entered the car window. The suction of the moving train threw sawdust upon the seat where the feet of the two men rested. They were drawing near to the station at Sawtown.

"Revun," Dinner asked, as he rose, "is you ever read up on dat Bible text whut says 'I wus a stranger an' I got took in'?"

"Suttinly," Hitch prevaricated.

"My last advices to you is to keep a eye on de people in dis here Sawtown. Dey takes a stranger in good an' plenty!"

Dinner dusted off his patent-leather shoes, adjusted his immaculate cuffs, felt of his green tie and his yellow diamond, lifted his Panama hat out of the rack, and brushed the cigar ashes off his gold and purple vest.

"Drap in de Hot-dog Club an' gimme a look-on, Revun!" Gaze invited as he stepped into the aisle. "I handles a pretty peart gamblin' game ef I do say it myse'f!"

The train stopped.

Dinner Gaze waited in the aisle, courteously permitting Hitch Diamond to precede him.

As Hitch passed out, Dinner Gaze cautiously elevated the tail of the pugilist's Prince Albert coat, carefully thrust two scissors-like fingers into Hitch's hip-pocket and drew out a small roll of

money. In its place he thrust a wad of newspaper of about the same size. When the train had gone on, Hitch looked for his friend and could not find him.

"Dar now!" he exclaimed. "Dat wus a fine nigger man an' I done loss him complete, an' I even fergot to ax him whut wus his name!"

II

"TOOK IN."

"De fust thing I needs is a sack of peanuts an' a awange to cut de dust outen my throat," Hitch said to himself, as he walked slowly down the village street.

He entered a small grocery, made his purchases, and thrust his fingers into his hip-pocket to bring forth his money.

Instead he extracted a wad of newspapers.

Hitch stupidly unfolded the paper, gazed at it with hypnotic fascination, searched all his pockets for his lost money, then searched them again, hunting for loose change.

The disgusted clerk tossed the bag of peanuts back into the roaster, laid the orange back on the shelf, walked over to a chair and sat down, his mind spluttering like wet fireworks with his unspoken comments on the colored race in general and Hitch in particular.

Hitch stumbled stupidly out of the store, broke and broken-hearted.

He looked around him uncertainly, then dragged his ponderous feet back toward the depot, hoping to find his lost money. After half an hour's search he gave it up and started aimlessly toward the river.

Half-way down the block he met a tall negro whose face was slightly disfigured by a broken nose. The man wore a checkerboard suit of clothes, a cowboy hat, and a sport shirt. Hitch's eyes fell first upon the emblem of a negro lodge which the man wore on the lapel of his coat.

Hitch eagerly laid hold upon his lodge brother, "I's in powerful bad trouble, brudder," he moaned. "I ain't know nobody in dis town an' I done loss all my money on my way to dis place. Whut kin be did?"

"De next best thing is to go down to de big mill an' set on de buzz-saw," the brother advised.

"Whut good will dat do me?" Hitch inquired.

"It'll fix you so trouble won't trouble you no more," Checkerboard grinned, patting Hitch on his powerful back. "Atter you takes yo' seat you won't need no money—de Nights of Darkness lodge will bury yo' remainders free fer nothin' an' sot you up a real nice tombstone."

"I got plenty white folks in my own home town," Hitch continued, paying no attention to his companion's foolishness. "I mought could git some he'p mebbe ef I had somewhar to wait at ontil dey sont me de money."

The checkerboard negro looked Hitch over; then his eyes narrowed and he smiled.

"As a lodge brudder in good standin', I could lead you to my own house an' keep you a little while," Checkerboard remarked. "Whar is yo' lodge pin?"

Hitch glanced down at the lapel of his coat.

"My gosh!" he mourned. "I done loss my money an' my lodge breastpin too. Dat breastpin wus jes' perzackly like de one you is got on an' wus gib me by Skeeter Butts."

"Suttinly," Checkerboard laughed. "Dey is all made alike an' look jes' de same. Mebbe de feller whut touched yo' wad frisked yo' pin, too."

"Dat's whut happened," Hitch sighed. "But it don't he'p me none to know dat news."

"You'se too blame young to be trabbelin' alone," Checkerboard snickered. "You needs a fust-rate gardeen. Foller atter me!"

He conducted Hitch to the rear of the big sawmill, led him through a maze of immense lumber piles, and brought him around the big mill-pond to a cluster of houses built by the owners of the mill for the occupancy of their negro employees.

There was one two-story house which looked like a barracks, and was intended for use by men who had no families. Into this Checkerboard led his companion.

"Set down, Revun," he smiled. "Dis here is my boardin'-house. I keeps it fer de 'commodation of de nigger workers in de mill whut ain't got no wifes an' no home. Dey eats in dat eatin'-house down dar by de mill-pond an' sleeps here."

"It's powerful hot in dis place," Hitch complained as he seated himself.

"We keeps de winders down in de daytime because eve'ybody whut stays here is busy in de mill," Checkerboard explained, as he pulled off his coat and hung it across his arm. "Pull off dat coat of yourn, an' I'll take yo' stove-pipe hat an' coat an' hang 'em up wid mine."

Hitch gratefully removed his hat and coat and sat down. He took a stogie from his vest-pocket and felt for a match.

"Don't you wanter take off dat vest, too?" Checkerboard inquired. "You might git seegar ash all over it."

"Dat's right," Hitch said, as he handed his friend the vest.

"Make yo'se'f at home, Revun," Checkerboard said graciously. "Smoke all you please to—spit on de flo'—ack like you wus at yo' own house! I got to hump aroun' a leetle on bizzness befo' de mill blows de whistle fer closin' time. But I tells you in eggsvance, dat as fur's I'm concerned, you kin stay in dis house fer a mont'."

"You is a true lodge brudder," Hitch rumbled in real gratitude. "I won't never fergit you!"

Checkerboard left the room, walked through the hallway, passed out of the rear door, clambered down into a gulley, and carried Hitch's clothes through a labyrinth of lumber piles to a place far, far away!

Hitch waited for nearly an hour for Checkerboard to return. Feeling the lack of companion-

ship, he walked down to the mill-pond and accosted the slouchy negro woman in the kitchen of the eating-house.

To his surprise he learned that she had never seen nor heard of the man in the checkerboard suit.

"It 'pears to me like dese here folks ain't plum' honest," Hitch mourned as he walked disconsolately around the mill-pond trying to find his way back to the village.

He spent a long time looking for the man who had his clothes, mumbling complainingly to himself the while. At last he wandered to the wharf on the Mississippi River and sat down with his back resting against a post.

His feet were unaccustomed to the wear of patent-leather shoes, and they felt swollen and tired. He took off his shoes, set them side by side in front of him, waved his feet in the cool river breeze, and gazed upon his footwear lovingly.

"I kin git me anodder hat an' coat," he muttered. "But dem shoes would be a powerful loss. Dar ain't no more shoes in N'Awleens dat'll fit my foots!"

Half a block away two little white boys were cutting monkey-shines on the sidewalk. In the dusty gutter one boy picked up a long, black stocking.

The two considered this find for a moment, then they gathered small sticks and thrust them into the stocking. One youth produced a ball of kite twine and tied an end of the twine around the open

end of the stocking. After that, they dropped the stocking upon the pavement and pulled it along by the string, observing the effect.

"It wiggles all right," they chuckled.

They looked around for a victim and spotted Hitch Diamond.

One of the boys held the stocking and concealed himself behind a pile of lumber on the wharf. The other boy, playing out the ball of twine, walked along the wharf, his bare feet making no sound. He passed close behind Hitch Diamond and stopped and concealed himself on the other side of some shipping about one hundred feet beyond the point where Hitch Diamond sat.

Then the boy with the ball began to wind the twine in. The long black stocking crawled up closer and closer to the inert form of Hitch Diamond.

Finally, when the stocking had wriggled grotesquely to within ten feet of Hitch Diamond, there was a loud whoop—a white boy ran from behind some lumber and shrieked:

"Look at that sna-a-a-ke, nigger! Jump!"

Hitch jumped.

He sprinted down the wharf a hundred yards, pattering along in his sock feet, leaving his precious shoes behind him.

The little white boy shrieked with laughter, picked up the wriggling stocking, and jumped next for Hitch's shoes.

For a moment he paused, filled with awe when he beheld their monstrous and incredible size;

then, doubtless reflecting upon their resemblance to a big mudscow, he put each shoe where a mudscow properly belongs—in the river!

"Hey, you nigger!" a wharf watchman called sharply, as Hitch, looking behind him, ran full tilt into the watchman's portly form.

"'Scuse me, boss!" Hitch grunted.

The watchman hung three strong fingers in the collar of Hitch's white shirt. Hitch didn't like that. He pulled away. The watchman pulled too. The inevitable happened.

Hitch's shirt tore half in two and hung limply in the watchman's hands as Hitch raced down the wharf clad in socks, pants, and a red undershirt!

The watchman disgustedly tossed his spoils on top of a lumber pile and gave himself up to the placid contemplation of the flight of some gulls on the river.

"Lawd," Hitch sighed, when he had dodged around the distant end of the wharf and had time to look down at his deficient apparel. "Dis here town shore is hard on clothes!"

III

FOURTEEN SWALLOWS.

Keeping the river levee between himself and the town so that no one could see him in his half-dressed condition, Hitch departed from the vicinity of Sawtown with expedition. When he reached the edge of the woods about a mile from

the mill, he sat down to think a way out of his difficulties.

"My head is jes' like a mule's head," he announced to himself. "I cain't hold but only one notion at a time. I been thinkin' so heavy all de time about my lost money dat I done loss all my good clothes, too. I oughter knowed better. Now I's gwine git active an' sot myse'f up in bizzness agin."

He sat for a long time in deep, silent meditation, trying to extract an idea from his slow brain. Then he concluded:

"I drunk too much dram in N'Awleens. My head ain't right. Ef I could git me a good dram now, mebbe I could think up a notion whut to do."

In his impoverished condition he saw no way of buying a drink. He cast about to see what he possessed which he might exchange for one, and pulled out of his hip-pocket his silk socks, the joy and pride of his life in their glorious coloring—purple, striped with yellow!

"Dey costed me two dollars," Hitch sighed as he gazed upon them fondly. "I could swap 'em off in Sawtown, but I ain't gwine back dar no more. Ef I does, some nigger will steal my pants an' my socks, too. Plenty of country niggers is got dram."

He walked barefooted through the woods and came out at a level plantation some distance back from the river. In the middle of a cow-pasture, a tall, brown, bright-eyed negro watched Hitch approach with impassive curiosity.

"Howdy, my brudder!" Hitch boomed. "How am yo' soul an' spirit dis day?"

"De spirit is pretty low, elder," the farmer replied. "De ole woman am got de dram all locked up tight."

"How come you choose de lily-pad route an' live on water?" Hitch asked in a disappointed tone.

"I got married," the young negro responded with a grin.

Suddenly a big Jersey bull broke through the underbrush and came toward the two men, snorting, bellowing, pawing the ground, tossing the dirt upon his shoulders, and shaking his powerful head.

"Dat's mine, stranger," the young man remarked proudly, removing the top from a bucket on his arm and tossing a handful of salt at the animal's feet. "He don't like dat red undershirt of your'n. Ain't him a dandy?"

"Shore is," Hitch said meditatively. After a moment, he added: "Ef dat ole bull wus to hook one of us, I 'speck yo' bride would affode us a little dram to stimulate us up."

"I resigns in yo' favor, elder," the owner grinned. "Ef dis here beast wus to butt me, he'd jolt all my kinnery plum' back to Afriky."

There was a period of silent and fruitless meditation. Then, sorrowfully, Hitch Diamond reached to his hip-pocket and brought forth his purple socks with the yellow stripes—all, except his trousers, that remained of his former glory.

"Whut's yo' name?" Hitch asked.

"Dey calls me Dude Blackum because I got a gold tooth," the other informed him.

"Whut is yo' wife called?" Hitch asked next.

"Dainty."

"I wants to make a little trade, Dude," Hitch remarked, after he had told his own name. "Dese here socks costed me two dollars. My head ain't thinkin' right to-day. You is a heavy thinker. Ef you kin think up a sketch of how I kin git a dram right now, I'll bestow dese here socks on you."

"De trade is did!" Dude grinned, showing his gold tooth. "Lemme think!"

"Bawl out, nigger!" Hitch grumbled after a little wait. "Don't keep me waitin' here in expense no longer."

"I wus studyin' 'bout dis," Dude said. "I's got a little touch of lumbago in my legs. An' mebbe, ef dat bull would jes' butt me real easy like, an' I'd kinder drap off in dat bayou an' git wet, an' den walk back home in drippy clothes wid dis mis'ry gnawin' at my legs——"

Hitch's face was so expressive of contempt that Dude stopped speaking.

"Is dat whut you call heavy thinkin'?" Hitch inquired in sarcastic tones. "Dat high-brow plan might steal you a nubbin of corn from a blind pig's slop-trough. But Dainty ain't no blind pig —dese here brides gits awful wise on deir husbunts atter dey marries 'em."

"Wait till I finish, Hitch," Dude begged.

"Now, my view is dis: you go up to de house an' cornverse Dainty till I comes in all wet an' mournin' 'bout how hurt I is. Atter I come in, you say to Dainty dat she better gimme a dram because I's so crippled up. Of co'se, she will hab to be manners an' gib you some, too."

"Dar, now!" Hitch boomed. "You shore is a smart boy, Dude. Dat plan is accawdin' to de Bible, wise as suppents an' harmless as ducks. But"——

Here Hitch broke off and looked down at his clothes.

"It 'pears to me it ain't proper to call on a lady when I is barefooted an' ain't got nothin' on but a pair of pants an' a red undershirt," he mourned.

"Dat won't make no diffunce," Dude assured him. "All de niggers wucks in de big mill dresses jes' like you is now. Dainty will figger dat you is a sawmill hand. Talk right up to her, Revun"——

"I ain't no preacher!" Hitch interrupted, growling like an angry bear. "I's a prize-fighter."

"Dat won't do," Dude chuckled, as he looked at the giant's mighty arms and shoulders. "Dainty is powerful sot on preachers. I 'speck you better be one as long as you is hangin' aroun' her."

"All right," Hitch said reluctantly, as he started away. "I ain't none too good or too proud to piddle wid dat job—ef I got to."

"Hol' on, Hitch!" Dude exclaimed. "You ain't gimme dem silk socks yit!"

Hitch's experience in Sawtown had made him cautious. After a man has parted with a certain

amount of his wearing apparel, he becomes reluctant to separate himself from the rest in a civilized community unless he contemplates becoming a hemermaid and living in the river.

Hitch held out one sock.

"I'll gib you one sock now, Dude," he said cunningly. "Dat'll keep yo' mind int'rusted. Atter I git de dram, I'll leave de yuther sock on de flo' or de mantlepiece, kinder keerless like."

Dude accepted the partial payment and stuck the gaudy sock into his derby hat and placed the hat on his head.

On his way to the cabin, which lay across the pasture, Hitch Diamond also did some heavy thinking.

"I wonder how much dram dat nigger woman is got," he muttered to himself. "I bet dar ain't enough for two. Ef she ain't nothin' but one of dese here soft, giggly, gal-wifes, mebbe I kin bamboozle her outen a dram befo' Dude comes in."

Dainty met Hitch at the door.

"My name am Hitch Diamond, Dainty," he rumbled. "I met Dude out in de cow pasture an' he tole me he done cormitted mattermony. I felt powerful bad because he didn't send fer his ole preacher frien' to come 'n' marrify him. He sont me up here to take a look at you."

"Come in, elder," Dainty giggled. "How is you feelin' to-day?"

"Lawd, honey, I feels a whole passel better since I sot my eyes on you. You's prettier'n a little pig. But I been feelin' powerful sick."

"Whut ails you?" the girl asked with instant sympathy.

"I's got a wo-begone spasm in my stomick an' a empty feelin' in my head."

"Dat's too bad," Dainty said. "Would a little drap——"

"Yes'm," Hitch responded promptly. "Dat's jes' de med'cine I needs. De dorctor obscribes brandy fer all my ailments."

Dainty extracted a key from the pocket of her dress and opened the door of a little storeroom which contained a little trunk. Drawing forth another key, she opened the trunk and brought out a jug.

"I's glad Dude didn't come to de house wid you," Dainty remarked. "I don't let him hab no more booze. He come home 'bout two weeks ago an' couldn't git past dat oak tree out dar in dat yard. He seed two trees whar dar wusn't but jes' only one, an' he mighty nigh butted his fool head off tryin' to walk between dem trees."

She set the jug and the drinking glass beside Hitch Diamond and took her seat in a rickety hide-bottomed chair.

Hitch looked at the glass, picked it up and fumbled it, and set it down apologetically.

"Sister Dainty," he murmured, "ef you ain't got no objections, I'll drink outen dis jug de way I wus raised."

Catching the handle with his left hand, he gave the jug a quick turn, rested it upon the crook of his uplifted elbow, and applied his lips to the spout. Dainty watched him with fascinated eyes.

When at last he set the jug upon the table and seated himself beside it, she said with a chuckle:

"Elder, when I wus a little gal I wus always countin'—I used to count de cobs in de feed-trough, an' de beans in a hull, an' de number of swallers a cow tuck when she drunk water."

"Jes' so," Hitch responded, wiping his mouth on the sleeve of his red undershirt.

"Seben swallers is a big drink fer a cow, elder," Dainty continued.

"Dat's right," Hitch agreed.

"Elder," Dainty chuckled, "when you wus drinkin' outen my jug, you swallered fo'teen times!"

"Yes'm," Hitch replied solemnly. "I tole you I wus feelin' powerful sick!"

Suddenly he remembered that he was playing the part of a preacher. He decided he ought to say something religous. So he began:

"Sister Dainty, dis am de Bible law about de imbibin' of awjus liquors: de amount of booze a man oughter drink depen's on how much he kin hold inside hisse'f an' at de same time resist de effecks; but, neverdeless an' howsumever, eve'y man oughter take a little dram fer his stomick's ache in case of powerful sickness."

"Yes, suh," Dainty agreed.

"Now you notify de case of yo' husbunt tryin' to make a goat of hisse'f an' butt down all de timber in de yard. I feels like I oughter tell you dat dat nigger is plum' full of guile. Right dis minute, he's figgerin' to fall in de bayou an' come to de

house all wet, an' say de bull done butted him, an' ax fer a leetle drap."

"Am—*dat*—so?" Dainty inquired with popping eyes.

"Yes'm," Hitch assured her. "Of co'se, a man in my perfesh don't harmonize wis no sech plans like dat. Hit's a sin ag'in' de conscience."

Dainty stood up and laid her hand upon the handle of the jug.

"I's gwine put dis jug back in de storeroom. Dude don't git none. He is a fraudful nigger!" She set the jug on the top of the trunk, locked the storeroom, and went to the kitchen.

Hitch heard her chopping kindling wood and rattling the stove-lids. He heard the roar of the fire as the flame from the rich pine-knots soared up the chimney.

Ten minutes later Dainty entered and sat down with Hitch again, her eyes gleaming with wifely resolution.

"Dar he comes now!" Hitch snickered, pointing through the window. "Look at him—wet as a b'iled owl an' walkin' lame in bofe behime legs like a stringhalt mule. Lawd, Lawd!"

IV

A PIPE OF 'BACKY.

The gate opened and Dude Blackum stumbled in, walking to the door with every manifestation of suffering his imagination could devise.

Hitch, standing behind Dainty so she could not see, encouraged Dude's painful progress by waving the other silk purple-and-yellow sock at him.

"My Lawd, Dainty," Dude wailed, "whut you reckin dat ole bull went an' done to me?"

"Butted you in de bayou!" Dainty answered promptly.

"Yes'm, dat's it! I's cripple in bofe behime legs fer life!" Dude told her as he clasped his back with both hands and groaned. "I couldn't swim a lick because I couldn't kick. Ef I hadn't paddled out wid my hands I'd 'a' been drownded."

He looked appealingly toward Hitch Diamond, waiting for the bogus elder to suggest the booze. But Hitch merely wiped his hand across his mouth and grinned.

"Dainty, honey," Dude said pleadingly, "I's powerful hurted, an' I feel like I's gwine hab a rigger. Ain't you got a leetle——"

"I shore has," Dainty replied eagerly, without waiting for the question. "Git in de yuther room an' take off dem wet clothes, an' by dat time I'll hab you a good dram ready."

With a beatific grin at Hitch Diamond, to which Hitch responded, Dude retired to change his clothes. A moment later he came out and said to Hitch:

"Gimme dat yuther silk sock!"

"A trade am a trade," Hitch grinned as he handed it over. "Ain't one sock wet?"

"Naw!" Dude whispered. "I laid it on de

groun' till I jumped in de bayou, an' I fotch it home under my hat."

When Dude reappeared he was clothed in his best suit and wore the gaudiest socks he had ever owned.

"Set down by dis table, Dude," Dainty said.

She went to the kitchen, and returned carrying a bowl, the rank odor of its contents permeating the room.

"My gawsh, Dainty!" Dude howled as she set the bowl of steaming liquid before him. "Whut is dis mess—a b'iled rat?"

"Naw," Dainty said in her sweetest tones. "It's a bowl of hot sass'fras tea!"

Dude howled his disgust.

"It's mighty good fer a nigger whut's had a accidunt, Dude," Dainty told him with suspicious gentleness.

Dude glanced at Hitch Diamond. That gentleman's face was set in a monstrous, mouth-stretching grin, and his eyes danced with unholy glee.

"Huh!" Dude grunted. He sheepishly bent his head over the bowl of sassafras tea and sipped its last drop without saying a word.

"Dat fake preacher prize-fighter is done scratched me out," he reasoned. "I'll git even, or die!"

Finishing his tea, Dude rose to his feet. "I's gwine out to feed de pigs fer de night, Dainty," he said. "I'll be back in a minute."

Dude sat down in the door of the corncrib and meditated deeply upon a proper method of retaliation.

"Dat Hitch Diamond thinks he's purty blame

peart in his head," he announced to himself. "He thinks dat he's got so much sense dat his eyes looks red."

He ran his hands deep into his pockets and meditated some more. Then he shook his head hopelessly.

"I ain't got nothin' in my head but squash-seed. When I tries to ponder, it gibs me blind-staggers in my brains. I hope, some day, dat nigger will hab to swaller a whole sassafras-tree!"

He stood up and started slowly back toward the house. He looked tired and worn. He had most certainly never heard of Ralph Waldo Emerson, but he would have agreed with that philosopher in the statement that "thinking is the hardest work in the world."

"I reckin I'll hab to take dese new socks fer my pay an' call it even," he sighed. "Dar ain't no revengeunce comin' to me. Dainty an' Hitch is too much team to pull ag'in."

He walked into the room where the two sat, nursing a grouch and by nó means disposed to be courteous to his guest. He took a corn-cob pipe from his pocket, scratched in the bottom of another pocket for some crumbs of smoking tobacco, and lighted up.

"Dude is got anodder pipe, elder. Would you wish to smoke?" Dainty inquired.

"Yes'm," Hitch responded. "It'll kinder sottle my stomick fer my supper vittles."

Dude arose grumpily, walked to the mantle shelf, and picked up a pipe. Out of one pocket

he brought a few crumbs of smoking tobacco, then scraped the bottom of another pocket for a few more crumbs. He emptied some papers and matches and pieces of string out of a mug on the mantle, and poured out a few more crumbs. Then, behind a picture, his eyes caught the gleam of metal, and he brought out something which looked like a flask. He poured a few crumbs out of this into his hand, finished filling the pipe as he turned his back, and reached for a match. Passing them to Hitch, Dude took his chair on the far side of the room near the open door.

Hitch struck the match and sucked the flame into the bowl of his pipe.

Pow!

The pipe burst into fragments, the room filled with smoke, Dainty screamed, and Hitch Diamond performed a number of interesting circus stunts and tumbled over in a squalling, bellowing heap upon the floor.

"Git de booze, Dainty!" Dude screamed. "Fotch out de jug! De elder is done committed death!"

Dainty sprang to the storeroom door, opened it, and handed Dude the jug.

"Oo-oo-ee!" Hitch whooped. "I's dyin' dead!"

"Go in de kitchen an' fotch a drinkin' cup!" Dude howled to his wife.

Dainty bounced into the kitchen, slamming the door behind her. Dude quickly latched the door so that Dainty could not enter the room again without going entirely around the house.

"Oo-oo-ee!" Hitch Diamond howled. "He'p!"

"Shut up, you ole fool!" Dude commanded as he walked over and bestowed upon the giant prize-fighter a most earnest and soul-satisfying kick. "Me an' dis jug ain't gwine 'socheate wid you no more. You ain't fitten comp'ny!"

"Don't leave me, Dude!" Hitch begged. "I's all collapsed down!"

Dude picked up his derby hat, stopped at the door, and looked back:

"Sass'fras tea is mighty good fer a nigger whut's had a accidunt, Hitch. Dainty makes it fine! Atter she fixes you a bowl I advises you to fill anodder pipe wid gunpowder outen dat flask behime dat picture an' take anodder smoke. Good-bye!"

Dainty came running around the house and entered the door. She was mad.

"Whut made you lock me out, elder?" she demanded.

"Dude done it," Hitch mourned, sitting upon the floor and feeling much better after learning what had caused his pipe to explode. "Dude is went!"

"Oh, Lawdy!" Dainty exclaimed. "Go an' fotch him back, elder! He'll be so drunk in no time dat he won't know whut end of hisse'f is straight up! Go!"

Hitch went. His intentions were good. He really desired to find Dude, because Dude had the jug. He purposed to hunt for him. But a man who has had fourteen swallows out of a jug of free whisky twenty minutes before cannot be expected to maintain a given purpose very long.

By the time Hitch had crossed the pasture, he needed all the woods along the river for walking room. The entire width of the levee was not too much to accommodate his devious journey back toward Sawtown.

On the edge of the town, near the commissary store of the big sawmill, he found a most interesting ditch. It was about ten feet wide and fifteen feet deep, and was hard and dry at the bottom.

He leaned over to examine that ditch with great care. He seemed to want to remember it, to impress it on his mind. It may fairly be presumed that he did impress it on his mind. He fell into it on his head.

At midnight he was sleeping in it undisturbed. A little after midnight something happened. A man walking down the deep gulley stepped on Hitch Diamond and woke him up.

V

AMONG THIEVES.

Hitch did not know how long he lay in the ditch after he had been awakened. He tried to remember where he was and how he got there, but he was half asleep and wholly confused, and the task was too great for him.

What woke him up completely was a long, shrill whistle, followed by four pistol-shots in rapid succession.

Hitch sprang to his feet and started running

down the gulley, but he stumbled in the dark and fell headlong.

Three more pistol-shots cracked in the still night air, a man screamed, and Hitch sprang up and started again. He stumbled and fell a second time.

Over in the far end of the big lumber yard a second whistle shrilled, the call of a night watchman, followed by the *crack! crack! crack!* of an automatic pistol. Then the big mill whistle roared its warning through the town and reverberated down the river and echoed from the woods, and deafened and terrified Hitch Diamond by its sinister call to the people of Sawtown to rouse themselves.

From the great number of little houses where the employees of the mill lived men issued forth, brandishing firearms and calling to each other as they ran. The electric lights in the mill flashed up, and in a brief time an immense crowd had congregated.

Hitch could hear their excited questions and answers.

"What's the matter?"

"Commissary store has been robbed and night watchman killed!"

"Who did it?"

"A nigger!"

"No! Two niggers!"

There was a moment of silence while the crowd considered this. Then a roar:

"Find them niggers and mob 'em! Come on!"

"Spread out, men! Cover the yard! Look everywhere!"

Hitch Diamond turned his back on that crowd and started in the opposite direction at full speed, running in the dark, with no notion where he was going. He got an idea when he plunged into the mill-pond up to his neck.

"Dis here is sloppy wuck!" he grunted as he climbed out of there.

He began to skirt the edge of the pond, and found to his alarm that he was following the curve which led him back to the lighted mill. He heard the sound of running feet; a flash-light shot its rays across the mill-pond, and Hitch departed from the water's edge with all possible speed.

He found one of the long alleys between the lumber piles in the yard and sprinted down the sawdust trail at a lively gait.

Glancing back over his shoulder, he found the entrance of the alley filled with men who were coming toward him with incredible swiftness. The employees of the mill were familiar with all the main thoroughfares and by-paths of the yard, while Hitch had to feel his way to some extent, and his progress was necessarily slow.

A revolver spat fire and lead at him, a fusillade followed, a big lumber-stack rose like a mountain before the frightened negro, and he fell against it with both hands outspread.

He found something that he had never noticed in a lumber yard before—that strips of wood were thrust between the layers of lumber to give a

circulation of air and prevent the lumber from rotting.

These little gaps made it possible for him to climb, and he scrambled up the pile like a big baboon and lay on the top, panting like the exhaust of an engine.

His pursuers passed the pile on the path below, and Hitch began to breathe easier.

In a moment a light flashed from a big lumber-pile fifty feet away and several feet higher than the pile he was on. A watchman was whipping about him with a dark lantern, searching the top of the lumber.

Hitch Diamond dropped over the side and hit the sawdust trail again. He ran down a little by-path, skinning his elbows upon the projecting planks and stubbing his bare toes against all kinds of obstacles, until he fell over something and tumbled onto something with a clatter like the roll of a snare-drum.

A man loomed up before him not twenty feet away and said "Ho!" in a frightened voice.

Hitch got up and went away from that place with astonishing speed.

Then the watchman on the lumber-pile threw the rays of his dark lantern down into the runway just as Hitch passed, and the terrified negro ran full into the glare.

Three pistol-shots splintered the wood around him as he ran on; the watchman's sharp voice called to the man-hunters, and in a second, hundreds of men had turned and were converging

toward the spot where Hitch Diamond was running around a lumber-pile like a trapped rabbit.

"Guard the runways, men!" the watchman's voice ordered sharply. "I'll flash the light into the alleys for you!"

The watchman began to leap from pile to pile, throwing the rays of his dark lantern down into each corridor, and coming constantly closer to where Hitch Diamond was hiding.

"My Gawd!" Hitch chattered as he looked up at the fantastic, mountainous pile beside which he was crouched.

Salvation came with the thought that the pile he stood beside was higher than the one on which the watchman stood. He began to climb, hand over hand, praying that the light would not reach him before he could attain the summit.

By the mercy of Heaven he rolled onto the top of the lumber just as the watchman, on a pile twenty feet below him, flashed the glare into the corridor where Hitch had stood a moment before.

Hitch was blowing like a bellows, streams of perspiration poured down his body, and his giant frame shook like the body of a man with an ague.

Days of dissipation in New Orleans, a drunken spree just a few hours before, nothing to eat since breakfast, half an hour of violent exercise running and climbing lumber, and a fright which clutched at his heart, weakening and almost suffocating him —all of these things were handicaps for Hitch Diamond in the effort he was making to escape.

He knew that capture meant certain death.

Capture was not even necessary—a flash of light, a well-directed pistol-shot, and his career was ended.

Suddenly his soul was filled with terror.

Twenty men had mounted the lumber-piles and were moving across the tops, lashing the lumber with their lights, driving everything before them as a woman shoos a lot of chickens. Below him, on the ground, men were standing at the end of each main thoroughfare, and were lashing them with light, while one man was walking down each by-path!

The searching party had organized, and was moving with perfect precision to cover the entire yard.

"Good-by, fair worl'!" Hitch Diamond mourned as he crawled to the edge of the lumber and looked down. "'Tain't no hope fer pore old Hitchie onless I kin hop offen dis lumber atter dat man is done passed down in de alley."

But the men on the ground had foreseen that possibility, and were measuring their progress down the by-paths by the progress of the men on the lumber-piles.

Seeing this, Hitch Diamond's heart turned to lead, his blood to water, and his giant frame seemed to crumble like chalk. Already he felt himself mortally stricken and dying.

He caught himself trying to speak, to utter words of encouragement to himself, but his teeth clicked together like castanets, and his whispered words fell upon terror-deafened ears.

He sprang to his feet and stood glaring at the

approaching lights like some great beast trapped in a jungle. Unconsciously he shut his fingers tight, his hands forming two immense iron fists.

That unconscious action made a man of him again! Those iron fists were the fists of a prize-fighter—Hitch Diamond, the Tickfall Tiger! Courage flowed through his veins like some magic liquor.

"Hitch never th'ows up de sponge!" he growled. "I fights to de eend!"

VI

THE TICKFALL TIGER STRIKES.

Hitch sat down upon the lumber-pile and slipped quietly over the edge, preparing to descend.

He hung the seat of his trousers upon a splinter and lunged forward in a sudden panic, tearing the garment almost off his body.

As he climbed quietly down the side of the pile, he hung the leg of his trousers upon a projecting stick and ripped the leg almost up to the waistband. Dropping down upon the sawdust path, he took a step or two and found that his torn pantaloons hindered his progress, and might afford his pursuers a hand-hold for his capture.

Sorrowfully he took the garment off and stood in his giant strength, panoplied in his red underclothes!

"There he goes!" a voice called in the dark.

Clenching his iron fists, Hitch started at full

speed. Ten men blocked the entrance before him. He went through them like an express-train, rolling some of them heels over head.

A man ran out of a by-path, and his head collided with Hitch's fist like a punching-bag. As the negro ran another, another, and another came out of the little pathways, and each one went down like a bag of salt. Thus Hitch arrived at the main passageway.

Then he found every by-path pouring forth its quota of men, every thoroughfare contributed its number, and every man upon the lumber-piles ran toward one spot to illumine the passage with their dark lanterns.

"Lawdymussy!" Hitch sighed. "Ef I don't mix wid 'em, dey'll shoot me!"

To the end of their lives, those powerful, husky sawmill men told with awe-stricken voices of the fight of that giant black in the lumber yard. Hitch mixed with them. No man dared to use his pistol for fear of killing a friend. It was a hand-to-hand battle, one negro against forty mill-hands.

With a wild, insane bellow Hitch hurled himself upon that mob of cursing, shrieking, clambering, clutching men, and they set upon him like ravening wolves.

The confusion was terrible, the noise was deafening, the shout and the tumult of the battle echoing back from the mountains of lumber. Hitch alone seemed to have a clear idea of his battle—he knew that every man was against him. The others hindered each other, but Hitch knew that he was

free to knock any nose and pound any head and butt any stomach.

The proximity of the lumber on each side of the thoroughfare was an aid to Hitch. When he hurled his mighty body into a crowd of his opponents, and they reeled back from the impact and struck the backs of their heads against the wood, it took them a few minutes to recover from the shock, while Hitch gave his attention to others.

His giant fists pounded heads as though they were egg-shells; his ponderous bare feet landed with mighty kicks in the stomachs and the backs of men; his long, iron arms whirled like the wings of a windmill, mowing them down, every man who was touched falling unconscious or helpless.

Four men clung to him like cockleburs to a sheep's wool, trying to drag him down by their weight. Hitch scooped them up in his mighty arms and fell with their combined weight against a pile of lumber, crushing them and breaking their holds.

An excited watchman on a lumber-pile above him sought to contribute a share to the battle by dropping upon Hitch's head a girder or joist such as is used in constructing the framework of houses. The piece of timber fell ten feet from Hitch's struggling body, and he set his hand upon it with a bellow of joy.

In that moment Hitch became another Goliath, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam, and whose spear's head weighed six hundred shekels of iron.

When Hitch began to lay about him with that joist the battle was won. The foolish watchman who had contributed such a mighty weapon to the enemy was so astonished that he fell, clattering, off the lumber-pile and broke his arm.

The men charged him once more, but Hitch waved his big piece of timber from side to side, mowing them down. A pistol-shot from the top of the lumber warned Hitch that it was time to leave.

A loud, disappointed wail sounded from the top of the lumber, where the men were operating the dark lanterns, and instantly began the crack, crack, crack of the pistols, shooting at Hitch as he ran down the corridor.

Men still arriving, coming in from other by-paths and avenues between the lumber, scrambled out of Hitch's way, fearful of being shot from above.

Hitch found a clear path and took it. In a little while he was out of range of the bullets and out of the glare of the lights. He scrambled over a low fence, and found himself in a side street outside of the lumber yard.

"Hey, men!" a triumphant voice shrieked. "Here he is! We've got him! Come on! We've caught him!"

Shriek after shriek arose from the middle of the lumber yard, accompanied by the triumphant voices repeating:

"We've got him!"

"Dey ain't got me!" Hitch grinned as he looked over his shoulder at the flashing lights

which were converging at another point on top of the lumber. "I's gwine drap down an' rest a minute; den I's gwine take dis red suit of underclothes to Tickfall, an' git some pants an' a coat to put on over it."

He dropped down in a thicket of plum-trees, completely exhausted. While he rested he listened.

"Kill him!"

"Befo' Gawd, white folks, I ain't done nothin', nothin'!"

"Knock him over the head with that jug and make him shut up!"

A loud scream and silence!

"I wonder whut road goes back to Tickfall?" Hitch whispered with fear-stiffened lips. "One dead nigger is more'n a plenty!"

Skirting the edge of the town to be out of the electric lights, Hitch Diamond sought the way to the river. With him every place was either up or down that great stream, and he remembered that Tickfall was up the river.

When he found the levee and stood looking out upon the dark water so great was his confusion that he was unable to tell which way the stream was flowing.

He heard behind him the shouts of the approaching mob, punctuated now and then by the terrible screams of a man being led out of the woods to suffer death. He shuddered and wondered that any man could make as much noise with his throat as did this terrified negro in the hands of the mob.

A moment later there was no question in Hitch's mind which way the Mississippi River was flowing, for Hitch was swimming noiselessly across the current toward the opposite shore. But the Father of Waters is no quiet mill-pond. The pressure of its mighty current is the push of every drop of water falling between the Rockies and the Alleghanies and the inflow of the rivers between. That current carried Hitch down the stream, in spite of his most powerful efforts to resist it.

Several men ran out on the levee and threw their lantern rays across the water.

Hitch promptly turned on his back and floated, riding the current as motionless as a log. When the light left the water, Hitch struggled on, fighting the dark, muddy stream.

Suddenly the water swept him against one of the immense cypress braces of the revetment levee. He seized it, almost dead with weariness. He realized that he was not twenty feet from the shore he had left, and but a short distance from the mob. But this revetment offered a hiding place, and he grasped it eagerly.

The voices of the mob came to him distinctly across the water.

"Befo' Gawd, white folks, you-alls ain't got me right!" the hopeless captive wailed. "I ain't done nothin' a-tall! All you white mens knows Dude Blackum—dat's me! I lives in de cabin jest up ferninst de mill-pond, an' wucks on a farm fer my livin'!"

"Shut up!"

The crowd which had fought and been defeated by Hitch Diamond was in no mood to listen to the explanations of another negro. A long, wailing cry was Dude Blackum's answer, and the mob moved on.

Suddenly there was a whoop, a clatter of pistol shots, a howling mob swarming over the levee, a splash of water, and a number of voices:

"Catch him! Head him off there! Kill him!"

A number of flash-lights whipped the water, and one big lantern shot a broad, blinding, dangerous streak. That flare of light caught the round, black head, swimming, struggling in the current, and held it.

"Now, men!" a voice called. "There's your mark—shoot straight!"

There was a fusillade—Hitch Diamond noted with elation that the black, woolly head bobbed on.

"Fer Gawd's sake!" Hitch murmured. "Why don't dat coon dive an' float?"

Suddenly an authoritative voice cried:

"Stop shooting, men! Get in your skiffs and row out there and catch that negro! It'll take him half an hour to swim the river!"

"My Lawd!" Hitch Diamond moaned. "Little Hitchie is shore up ag'in it now!"

"Hurry, men!" the same authoritative voice called.

There was the sound of running feet along the levee, then a moment of breathless silence while the flash-lights lashed the water.

Then far out into the stream there was a loud scream, a loud splash, and silence!

"Dar now!" Hitch mourned. "De water cramps got him! He's dead!"

The lights of the lanterns searched everywhere. No black object floated, nothing at all was seen.

The same clear, authoritative voice spoke again, and a tone of sadness softened it:

"I guess that's all, men! We may as well go home now!"

"I's gwine home, too!" Hitch Diamond whimpered piteously.

VII

GOING HOME.

He climbed down the levee, after battling his way across the river, found a public highway on the other side, and stepped into the middle of the road. Looking about him cautiously, he inflated his lungs with air. After that he dropped his hands to his sides and began a steady and persistent trot, his feet striking the sand with the monotonous regularity of a ticking clock, each stride carrying him away from the scene of his adventure.

Hour after hour, as persistent as a desert camel, Hitch moved ahead, his breath like a husky bellows, his body pain-shot from his many wounds.

By early dawn he was miles away, tortured by hunger and compelled to face the fact that he

could not go to a house and beg for food, nor could he forage in the daylight for lack of clothes.

"Lawd," Hitch mourned. "Ef I ever git back to Tickfall, I's gwine git on de water-wagon, an' cut out de booze. I'll cut out prize-fightin', cussin', an' trabelin' aroun'. I'll git me a good, easy job 'thout much work to do, an' rest my bones till I die!"

As the first faint streaks which marked the rising of the sun shot across the sky, Hitch left the road and walked toward the river.

He entered some deep woods and crawled into a thicket of small trees which were heavily draped with muscadine vines. Dragging these vines down and packing them around him so that they made a complete covering, he lay flat on the ground and slept like a dead man until darkness came again.

When Hitch awoke he could see the dim outlines of the river levee, and he started toward it, every muscle stiff and aching and crying for more rest.

"I's gwine git over on my own side of dis river befo' I fergits whut side I b'longs on," he soliloquized. "Bad luck is hittin' me too fast fer me to take any chances!"

Weak from hunger and weariness, with his strength bound by his stiff and aching muscles, the current carried Hitch almost a mile down the stream before he could battle his way across.

When he landed he lay for an hour upon the shore, hardly able to move. At last he started,

going away from the river until he found the public road, then turned to the right and started forward on a steady trot.

Daylight found him twenty-seven miles nearer Tickfall, and the third day had begun for him without food. Hunger gnawed at his stomach with the teeth of death.

As he approached the woods where he expected to hide for the day, he noticed a thin column of smoke rising above the branches of the trees.

"Ef I kin find dat fire in de woods, an' some nigger is watchin' it, I won't hab no trouble," Hitch muttered. "Dey'll onderstan' dat I's done had troubles an' dey'll git me some pants an' somepin to eat."

He crept into the timber and began to walk slowly and cautiously toward the place where he thought he had located the smoke.

It was much farther than he had estimated, and he crawled and crept for a long time before he reached it.

Some one had cooked food there, for an old tin can was still redolent of boiled coffee; there were the feathers of a chicken, and the scales of a fish, and the crumbs of bread.

Moaning to himself like a wounded animal, Hitch dropped upon all fours and picked up every crumb of bread, and sucked the remaining sustenance from every chicken and fish bone which had been cast aside, and drained every drop of coffee from the empty can.

Then he heard a noise behind him and turned

to gaze into the scarred, black, masklike face of Dinner Gaze.

Hitch was not at all surprised to see some negro from Sawtown hiding in the woods. In fact, he knew if the negro who built the fire was a traveler he had very likely come from that mill town.

The proverb that the wicked flee when no man pursueth does not apply to the negro in the South. However innocent he may be of crime, he desires to depart from a place where there has been trouble between the negroes and the whites. If he is a transient like Hitch Diamond, or his occupation is rather questionable, like the gambling-house of Dinner Gaze, he is sure to leave at the earliest opportunity and go where he has friends or where the white people who know him will defend him from harm.

"Hello, Dinner!" Hitch exclaimed.

Dinner's black, beadlike eyes glowed unwinkingly.

"I thought they kilt you in de river, Revun," he muttered in his soft, easy voice.

"Naw, suh, dey wusn't atter me," Hitch said with difficulty, feeling a great weakness and nausea come over him. "Dey kotch Dude Blackum an' Dude escaped away. He sunk while he was swimmin' in de river."

"Did de mob tear all yo' clothes off?" Dinner Gaze asked.

"Naw, suh; I had bad luck an' loss all my clothes befo' dat happened. Dat's how come I got to trabbel at night."

"Is you hongry?" Gaze asked.

"Ain't had nothin' fer two days, an' dis is de beginnin' of de nex' day," Hitch told him.

Dinner Gaze picked up a small handsatchel which he had set down at his feet and prepared to leave.

"I's sorry you didn't git here in time fer breakfast, Revun," he said. "Ef you'll stay right here I'll go git you some ole clothes an' a little vittles. I kin beg 'em from some white folks's house."

"I's mighty nigh dead wid bein' so hongry, Dinner," Hitch pleaded. "Ef you'll he'p me outen dis scrape I'll shore love you ferever."

"Don't be oneasy," Dinner grinned. "I'll he'p you as much as I kin."

Dinner may have intended to aid Hitch, but that portion of Tickfall Parish was scantily inhabited. He walked several miles before he came to a human habitation, and there he was refused both food and clothes.

Furthermore, Hitch had said enough to cause any man to suspect that he was implicated in the Sawtown murder, and negroes are afraid to render aid and comfort to criminals, even of their own race.

Hitch waited for several hours, and finally fell asleep, dreaming of all the things he had ever seen or heard of that were good to eat. He awoke at nightfall, famished. Dinner Gaze had not returned.

"Dat nigger lied to me!" Hitch exclaimed desperately. "Ef I had him here I'd kill him

wid my bare hands. Ef I ever git de chance to even up, I'll do it ef I die!"

Cursing his misfortunes, he arose and stumbled weakly forward.

Two days later Hitch Diamond stumbled up the steps of the little cabin at the Gaitskill hog-camp, seven miles from Tickfall. He fell unconscious at the feet of old Isaiah Gaitskill, the negro overseer.

"My Lawd!" Isaiah exclaimed, clawing at his white wool. "Wharever Hitch has been at, he comed away so fast dat he runned out of all his clothes!"

VIII

THE HOODOO GIRL.

It was Sunday morning in Tickfall. A crowd of men were standing in front of the Shoofly Church, idly waiting and chewing tobacco. A row of men sat like buzzards upon the top of the rickety fence, also chewing tobacco. Half a dozen saddle-horses stood hitched to the trees and two-score dilapidated buggies stood in a row with their horses hitched to the fence.

Now and then some young negro girl wandered aimlessly toward one of these buggies, then hastened her footsteps as if she had just remembered leaving something under the seat.

Some young negro man quickly ceased his low-toned conversation and watched her out of the

corner of his eye. Presently the girl climbed into the buggy and sat down. Promptly the young man left his companions and went and sat beside her. That was the end of their interest in the services to be conducted in the church that morning.

The young man had found the saint of his deepest devotion.

The Rev. Vinegar Atts came stalking across the churchyard like a turkey walking through mud and dressed in all his Sunday finery. None of the men seemed to be aware of his presence. Vinegar reflected on the strangeness of this, and began to ponder uneasily on his chance of retaining his job as the preacher at the Shoofly Church.

He bowed and spoke to all the men, and hardly one of them gave him a nod of recognition in return.

Vinegar determined to find out the cause of this indifference, and he chose for his informant a man named Pap Curtain—a tall, slim negro with a yellow monkey face and an habitual sneer upon his lips.

"Whut ails you niggers to-day?" Vinegar demanded in a trembling voice. "How come dis here awful silence aroun' dis church?"

"Hoodoo gal!" Pap Curtain answered laconically, pointing across the churchyard.

"Huh!" Vinegar grunted with popping eyes.

On the other side of the yard old Ginny Babe Chew, a woman of immense size, was walking beside a slim young negress dressed in white and very handsome.

"Huh," Vinegar grunted again, unable to comprehend.

"How much will you gib me fer a piece of real news, Revun?" Pap inquired.

"Ef you got any tales to tell, bawl out!" Vinegar snapped, for the men's actions were getting on his nerves.

"You remember hearin' 'bout dat Dude Blackum whut got into trouble wid de white folks at Sawtown las' Monday night?" Pap asked. "Well, suh, dat little gal wid Ginny Babe Chew is Dainty Blackum, Dude's cote-house wife!"

"My Lawd!" Vinegar growled as he sat down upon the ground under a tree like a man suddenly overcome by weakness. He pulled out his corncob pipe and gave himself up to troubled meditation as he filled and lighted it. After a few moments he said:

"Pap, de niggers never will git over deir skeer 'bout dat little entertainment wid Dude Blackum. I don't b'lieve he done whut de white folks said he done."

"Hush!" Pap cautioned. Then he asked: "Whut diffunce do dat make now? He's done dead!"

There was a long silence while the two men watched the handsome, graceful girl walking beside the elephantine form of Ginny Babe Chew. Finally Pap Curtain said aloud as if to himself:

"She's tall an' wavy like a stalk of sugar-cane, an' sweet plum down to de groun'."

"She ain't mournin' so powerful deep fer dat

Dude Blackum," Vinegar remarked. "She's dolled up in a white dress!"

"Dat Dude Blackum shore did lose somepin beside his life when he parted wid dat female woman," Pap said. "Ef I could hab a gal like dat keepin' house fer me, I'd shore cut out all meanness ferever."

Vinegar Atts shuddered and rose to his feet.

"I ain't waste no time talkin' 'bout dead niggers," he said uneasily. "I done seed de ghost of dat Dude Blackum 'bout fo'teen times."

"You ain't by yo'se'f in dat, Revun," Pap sighed. "Eve'y time I thinks of dat nigger I gits de jiggety-jams."

"I knowed Dude Blackum a little bit—I seed him on de train once," Vinegar said. "But 'pears like his ha'nt ain't gwine let me alone a-tall!"

Dainty and Ginny Babe walked up the steps and entered the Shoofly Church, followed by the curious eyes of all the men in the yard.

"Dar now!" Vinegar mourned. "'Tain't no use to try to hab preachin' dis mawnin'—dat hoodoo gal is done got dis meetin'-house in a mess. I feels like somebody is done criss-crossed my head wid a rabbit-foot."

He knocked the tobacco from his pipe and thrust it into his pocket, his eyes set upon the door through which the girl had passed.

"When did Dainty Blackum come to Tickfall?" Vinegar asked.

"Yistiddy. Ginny Babe Chew met her at de

deppo. Some yuther niggers come up from Sawtown, too. You know how niggers is—dar's a scatteration when somepin like dat happens."

"Yes, suh. De guilty niggers scatterates as fur as dey kin git an' as quick as dey kin go," Vinegar agreed. "De not guilty niggers hikes out of de place to de near-by towns an' waits till de clouds rolls by."

"I's jes' whisperin' to you 'bout dat Dainty Blackum, Vinegar," Pap said suddenly. " I ain't gwine 'round braggin' no brags 'bout knowin' dis Blackum gal. White folks gits awful rambunctious when a nigger kills a white man like Dude done."

"I ain't sayin' nothin'," Vinegar murmured. "I done j'ined de lodge of silunce."

The two men separated, Vinegar enterin' the large, cool, dilapidated church. The band of men standing in the yard followed, as a drove of mules follow a gray mare upon the dusty highroad. The buzzard-like men climbed from their perches on the fence, dusted the seats of their trousers by quick, sliding motions of each hand, and entered the building. In the intense silence their heavily shod feet made ugly noises upon the uncarpeted floor.

Vinegar sensed tragedy everywhere. He looked around him uneasily, spotting certain unfamiliar faces in the congregation.

Ginny Babe Chew sat on the front seat with Dainty Blackum, the two occupying the middle row of pews. On Vinegar's right, on the front

seat, sat a man who had a knife-scar in his neck, a bullet-scar on his cheek, and the top of his left ear was missing. On Vinegar's left was a tall, ladder-headed negro, dressed like a preacher, sitting on a front bench.

There was no organ or other musical instrument in the church. Vinegar Atts, who had a voice like a pipe-organ, always raised his own tunes and depended upon Skeeter Butts, Figger Bush, and Hitch Diamond to carry the music in the congregation.

Vinegar looked in vain for his three friends to-day. Hitch Diamond had been gone for three Sundays; Skeeter Butts was organizing a baseball nine, and Figger Bush had gone away with a fishing-party of white people.

Suddenly the voice of Dinner Gaze, sitting on Vinegar's right, rose loud and clear in the silence:

"On de yuther side of Jordon,
In de sweet fields of Eden,
Whar de Tree of Life is bloomin',
Dar is rest fer you!"

No one in the congregation knew the song, and the solo-voice floated out like the song of a bird. The people sat with bowed heads and listened. When the song ended Vinegar walked out of the pulpit and extended his hand cordially to Dinner Gaze.

"Glad to meet yo' 'quaintance, my brudder!" he rumbled. "Will you h'ist de toons fer us?"

IX

DINNER GAZE SINGS.

Dinner Gaze rose from his seat and, stooping as if he were trying to catch a rat, walked to the front of the congregation. Pausing a moment, his body began to weave to and fro as if in conformity to the words of Scripture: "All my bones shall praise thee." Then to the surprise of the congregation, after all this orthodox preparation for starting a tune, Dinner Gaze suddenly walked back to his former place and sat down! In the meantime Vinegar Atts was getting acquainted with the other stranger on the opposite side of the house.

"Yes, suh, my name is Tucky Sugg," the stranger told him. "I ain't no reg'lar preacher, but I exhausts a little befo' de people sometimes."

"I hopes you'll take up yo' stayin'-place wid us," Vinegar said cordially. "Us needs good mens."

He turned to motion to Dinner Gaze to start the song, and found that Dinner had gone back to his seat.

"Whut ails you, brudder?" he asked.

"I's skeart I don't know enough toons to lead de singin'," Gaze said with a grin. "I retires."

Vinegar's eyes fell upon Ginny Babe Chew.

"H'ist a toon, sister!" he commanded. In a hoarse bellow Ginny Babe began:

"Blow—ye—de—trumpet—blow——"

One line was enough.

The words were not inspiring, the tune and tone and manner of the fat leader was a call to penitence, anguish, and tears.

Vinegar sprang to his feet.

"Dat's won't do, sister!" he interrupted. "Less sing *dis* toon!"

He began a song in a bellow which shook the rafters of the house and rattled the windows and threatened to crumble the foundations of the building. The song was a jay-bird affair, waltz-music to the stanza and jig-time to the chorus. The song might as well have been totally unfamiliar to the congregation. It was really one of their favorites — but, in spite of that, they let Vinegar sing it through as a solo.

Verily, the hoodoo was working.

Vinegar was appalled at the unresponsiveness of his congregation, and when the crowd had listened without objection or commendation to a solo prayer and to a reading from the old, worn Bible upon the desk, the preacher was almost in hysterics. He had never seen anything like that before.

Vinegar turned to Ginny Babe Chew a second time and said desperately:

"Now, sister Ginny, less hab anodder song—a lively toon whut eve'ybody knows!"

Ginny Babe Chew rose to her feet, her hand started the gestures of an old-fashioned singing-master, her body "weaved," her voice arose in a

high, drawling falsetto, utterly unlike her natural tone:

"Blow—ye—de—trumpet—blow—"

If the human eye had power to slay, Ginny Babe would now be dead. Vinegar Atts glared at her with such a murderous look that the congregation forgot to sing and watched him. Ginny Babe turned and gazed at the preacher with the air of a hurt child, and quietly took her seat.

There was continued silence in the congregation. Vinegar raised another tune:

"I muss tell de good Lawd all of my trials,
I cannot bear dese here burdens alone!"

There was continued silence on the part of every one except the preacher. The congregation knew the song and loved it, but they acted like they had never heard either the song or the tune. They were certainly lacking in that Christian coöperation which the song recommended, and Vinegar had to tell his troubles and trials without their assistance.

Then in utter desperation, Vinegar turned again to Dinner Gaze and said pleadingly.

"Fer Gawd's sake, brudder, come out here an' sing us a sweet toon—it don't make difference even ef we don't know it."

Long after Dinner Gaze had ended his brief sojourn in Tickfall, the congregation of the Shoofly Church remembered him as he stood before them

with his scarred face and sang the song of the shining shore:

"My days are gliding swiftly by,
An' I, a pilgrim stranger,
Would not detain 'em as dey fly
Dem hours of toil an' danger;
Fer, Oh! We stand on Jordon's strand
Our frien's are passin' over;
An' jest befo', de shinin' sho'
We may almost discover."

After this Vinegar arose, announced his text, and began his sermon.

Thereupon Aunt Biddy Chivill, an old negress, deaf as an adder, arose from one of the pews and seated herself in a chair inside the altar railing. Unrolling a trumpet hose she had inherited at the death of a wealthy white woman in Tickfall, she screwed the parts together with great pride and ostentation, and settled herself to listen.

Vinegar spoke about four sentences to which Biddy Chivill listened attentively. Then with an air of final decision, Biddy removed the trumpet from her ear, unscrewed each part with great care and stowed the instrument away in a bag which she carried in her lap, taking great pains to lock the bag. Folding her hands across her lap she fell into peaceful slumber while Vinegar Atts bellowed on.

Sister Ginny Babe Chew, having attempted two abortive toots upon her trumpet, also fell asleep.

But while Aunt Biddy Chivill slept, her little four-year-old granddaughter became immediately active and very much awake. She crept out into the aisle and began to walk around aimlessly, her bare feet making no noise upon the uncarpeted floor.

For a while she amused herself by staring into the faces of the men and peeping under the sunbonnets of the women. The hands which were stretched out to arrest her were carefully avoided, and she rewarded each person making the attempt with a childish scowl.

Then she sat down upon the floor and crawled under the benches. She lay on the floor and rolled under the benches, bobbing up at unexpected places with an angelic smile.

After this she found a large box in the rear of the church.

In spite of the town stock laws, the hogs ran wild in that portion of Tickfall known as Dirty-Six, where the Shoofly Church was located. Many of these animals had their sleeping place under the church, and the building was infested with fleas.

It was a custom when a church meeting was to be held, to sprinkle the floor with lime and sweep it out, thus ridding the house temporarily of the insects. For that purpose a large box of lime was kept in the rear of the church.

It was this box that the little black baby girl discovered. She stood on tiptoe, stretched herself up, and looked in. It was white, very white, inside. She reached over the edge and touched the white-

Drawn by E. W. Kemble.

The " Revun " Vinegar Atts began his sermon.

ness. She brought the hand out and looked at it. It also was white.

Then the child reached into the box with both hands, filled them with lime, and rubbed them on her face. By the mercy of heaven, she did not get any of the stuff into her mouth and eyes. Then she sat down and rubbed her feet with lime. The effect was gratifying and she smiled.

By this time the sermon was ended. Vinegar had not done much, but he had done the best he could.

"Brudder Tucky Sugg will pray for us!" Vinegar bawled.

The congregation reverently bowed.

Then a little black girl with lime-whitened face and hands and legs, trotted silently up the aisle and stood beside brother Tucky Sugg, listening earnestly to his bawling voice.

She stretched out a tiny, lime-whitened hand and touched Tucky Sugg timidly on the top of his step-ladder head.

"Who you tryin' to talk to, Revun?" she asked in a bird-like voice.

Tucky Sugg opened his eyes and saw something he had never seen before.

With a loud bellow like a frightened cow, he rolled backward on the floor, and got up with an intense desire to run.

"My Gawd!"

The voice was like an explosion of dynamite, and expressed the consternation of the congregation as they rose to their feet prepared for flight.

Ginny Babe Chew awoke from her slumbe
She stared at the little child a moment, the
reached out a fat, motherly hand.

"Come here, honey!" she bawled. "Y
mammy oughter had washed yo' face an' hanc
befo' she sont you to de meetin'-house."

She wiped the lime off the child with the end c
her apron, and took the child in her lap.

Then, while the congregation was still standin
Dinner Gaze from his place at one side of th
house began to sing, while all stood and listened:

"At de feast of Bill Shasser an' a thousan' of hi
lords,
While dey drunk from golden vessels as de Book c
Truth records,
In de night as dey reveled in de royal palace hall,
Dey wus seized wid cornsternation—'twas de Han
upon de wall!
So our deeds is recorded—dar's a Hand dat's writir
now.
Sinner, gib yo' sins de go-by an' to de Marster bow
Fer de day am approachin'—it must come to one ar
all
When de sinner's corndamnation will git written on d
wall!"

On the instant that the song ended, a long, wail
ing cry, that was at once full of anguish and heart
break, ran through the building!

Old Isaiah Gaitskill, superintendent of the Gait
skill hog-camp, ran down the aisle, clawing at th
white wool which fitted his head like a rubber cap

His face was ashy with the dust of the high-way, and tears had streaked it where they had run downward through the dust.

"My Gawd, cullud folks!" he wailed. "De white folks is done kotched Hitch Diamond—dey are fotchin' him to jail right now! Here dey come down de big road. Oh, my Gawd!"

The old negro turned and fell with his hands clasping the altar, sobbing like a child.

X

HOME AGAIN.

The entire congregation ran out of the building into the churchyard and looked up the street. To the end of their lives they never forgot what they saw.

Hitch Diamond, bareheaded, barefooted, dressed in a red undershirt and a pair of blue overalls, was walking down the middle of the street, his hands manacled behind him, his head hanging in shame.

Dust covered him from head to feet, and perspiration streamed down his face. He had tried to wipe the perspiration away by rubbing his head upon his broad shoulders, and this had smeared his face with mud until he was a horrible creature to behold.

Hitch looked old, he looked sick. All of the pride and jauntiness which had characterized him when he left Tickfall for the prize-fight had dropped away, and he was merely the shell of the

man who had gone away from home to certain pugilistic victory.

On either side of Hitch Diamond rode a strange white man—New Orleans detectives employed by the mill owners of Sawtown to track the fugitive down. Behind the three rode the sheriff of Tickfall Parish, Mr. John Flournoy.

Dainty Blackum ran back into the church and brought from the pulpit a glass pitcher with a broken spout. She met Hitch and the officers right in front of the church, and the officers called a halt as she held the pitcher up to Hitch Diamond's thirsty lips. Then, dipping a handkerchief into the water, she wiped the mud and sweat from the tortured man's face.

Wail after wail arose from the crowd of negroes in front of the Shoofly Church, and Hitch turned and looked at them as if he did not realize where he was.

Vinegar Atts ran out and placed his trembling hand upon Sheriff Flournoy's dusty stirrup.

"Whut dey got Hitch fer, Marse John?" he sobbed.

"Murder!" Flournoy growled through jaws which were shut together like a bear-trap. "He killed the night watchman at the Sawtown mill!"

The party started again, and Vinegar stood in his tracks as if turned to stone.

It seemed to take a few minutes for the Shoofly congregation to comprehend what Flournoy had said, or else the shock was so great that even their emotions could find no expression, voluble as they

are as a race. Then a moan of sorrow swept like a deep-toned note from some mighty musical instrument; it was rich, melodious, heart-breaking —an expression of the deepest and most acute grief of their humble lives.

For Hitch was the hero of the colored population of Tickfall. They had shared his glory as victor in many a hard-fought fistic battle. They had won many dollars on his prowess as a boxer. They had helped to train him and perfect his wonderful physical organization for every contest he had ever participated in, and they loved him!

And Hitch deserved their affection. According to his lights he was a good man, a clean liver, one who took the best care he knew how of his superb body. There was nothing vicious or ugly about his disposition. He was merely a great, strong, bone-headed pugilist, who had made the most of himself by developing and using the best talent he possessed, namely, his giant strength.

Still moaning like the sea as the tide flows out, the Shoofly congregation flowed out into the road and fell in behind, forming a long procession of sorrowing friends.

Suddenly, above the low moan, in a tone which ripped and roared and snarled like the angry water breaking through a levee, came the mighty voice of Ginny Babe Chew:

"Murder! Murder! Murder! Whut do Gawd Awmighty think about dat?"

She pranced down the street, thrusting the people aside with her ponderous body as a steam-

boat cuts through the mushy ice upon a river. Her voice howled like a wolf's call, with a taunting, bark-like, malicious, nerve-searing gratification:

"Murder!"

She managed to reach the head of the procession and walked just behind Sheriff Flournoy's horse.

She whirled round and round like a Dervish, stooped and threw dust in the air, tore her clothes, and waving her fists at the sky shrieked like a maniac:

"Murder! Murder! Murder!"

John Flournoy stopped his horse, and turned and looked at her with a queer expression upon his face. Once he opened his mouth to speak, then shut his jaws tight, turned his eyes forward and rode on.

"Murder!" Ginny Babe Chew screamed.

Vinegar Atts could endure the horror no longer. He ran forward, and caught Ginny Babe by her fat shoulder and whirled her around. Vinegar had had years of experience as a pugilist and was Hitch's boxing partner to this day. He knew exactly where to place his blow.

His open palm with all his strength behind it flattened upon Ginny Babe's squalling lips. She uttered a low grunt, and fell in the street.

John Flournoy looked back and nodded his approval.

The crowd coming behind split in two halves, and walked around Ginny's prostrate body, noting without pity that a stream of blood was flowing from her thick lips. The crowd behind had been

augmented by hundreds before they reached the Hen-Scratch saloon.

Skeeter Butts had just come to town in his automobile, and was standing in front of his place of business. His face turned the color of ashes, and his lips stiffened with horror as he realized what was coming down the street to meet him.

"Oh, Hitch!" he wailed. "Shorely dey ain't got you right, is dey, Hitch? Tell me dat dey done missed it!"

But Hitch was too tortured to reply. He cast one lingering look upon his friend, and turned away with blood-shot, agonized eyes. Skeeter Butts reeled back from the middle of the street and covered his eyes with his trembling hands.

For a while after that the procession moved forward in silence. Then a succession of piercing screams shattered the atmosphere. A handsome girl, whose hands and face were the color of old gold, came running down the street, and threw her arms around Hitch Diamond's neck.

"Oh, Hitchie! Hitchie! Hitchie!" she screamed.

It was Goldie Curtain, Hitch's wife.

For a moment Hitch's giant body wavered, his knees bent under him, and he staggered as if about to fall. He stopped and leaned heavily upon the sobbing girl whose arms clasped his neck.

"Move on!" a sharp-voiced officer spoke.

Goldie Curtain fell in the dust of the street like one dead. Sheriff Flournoy, whose face was turned to look behind him, did not see her lying there. His nervous horse leaped over her prostrate body.

Vinegar Atts, sobbing aloud, picked the girl up in his powerful arms, carried her into her own house and placed her upon a bed. Then he came out and joined again with the crowd which followed Hitch until the doors of the jail closed behind him.

When Hitch had passed out of sight behind those doors, Ginny Babe Chew came staggering down the street, wiping the blood from her lips and the front of her dress. She stood in the middle of the street in front of the jail, shrieking like a maniac. She stooped and gathered handfuls of sand and tossed them into the air above her head, while her calliope-like voice shrieked again and again:

"Good-by, Hitch! Good-by, Hitch! Good-by, Hitch!"

XI

UP AGAINST IT.

A whole week passed during which Skeeter Butts sat in the Hen-Scratch saloon, nervously smoking cigarettes and listening to the whispered tales which came to him from his negro friends.

Skeeter had made no attempt to see Hitch Diamond, and had not talked about him to any of the white people. He knew it was not wise to show too much interest in the case of a negro criminal. He did not care to get himself under suspicion. All of Hitch's friends felt the same way, and since their first dramatic display of emotion as Hitch

was led captive before the Shoofly Church, they had assumed an attitude of indifference toward Hitch and his pitiable plight.

It was the Sunday following Hitch's return to Tickfall when Skeeter determined to interview Sheriff John Flournoy. Skeeter timed his call with the sheriff's custom of sitting on a little side porch of his home and smoking an after-dinner cigar.

Skeeter fumbled for a few minutes with his hat, considering how to begin what he had to say. Then he asked:

"Marse John, whut is de white folks gwine do wid Hitch Diamond?"

"Hang him!" Flournoy said bluntly, merely for the purpose of seeing what Skeeter would say next.

The colored man said nothing for five minutes. He sank down weakly upon the bottom step of the porch, his shoulders pathetically hunched, and his head resting upon his hands. At last he mumbled:

"Marse John, I don't b'lieve Hitch kilt anybody. He never done it."

"Have you any proof of his innocence, Skeeter?" Flournoy asked.

"Naw, suh."

"It's hard for me to believe, Skeeter," Flournoy continued quietly. "Hitch Diamond was born on my plantation, and ever since I have known him he has been a big, good-natured, bone-headed, peaceable, law-abiding negro. Robbery and murder are not in his line."

"Dat's right, Marse John—Hitch never done it."

There was a little silence, after which Flournoy said:

"I think they've got Hitch, Skeeter. Some of the white people in this town have always been very fond of Hitch. They ought to come to his aid at once—he's their nigger. But all the white folks have kept away."

"Dat's a bad sign, Marse John," Skeeter agreed mournfully.

"Yes. It means that Hitch is up against it."

"Whut proofs is dey got, Marse John?" Skeeter asked.

Replying, Flournoy spoke slowly and painfully, as if the narration was repugnant to him:

"Hitch Diamond got off the train at Sawtown about three o'clock on Monday afternoon. A grocer saw him dressed in a stove-pipe hat, a Prince Albert coat, and a yellow waistcoat. A little later he was seen by two small white boys without his hat, coat, or vest, sitting on the wharf-boat. A watchman on the wharf-boat says that Hitch attempted to run when he came near, and in the effort to arrest Hitch his shirt was torn off his back. Dainty Blackum says that Hitch came to her home, barefooted, bareheaded, with no outer shirt, but wearing a red undershirt.

"Hitch Diamond and Dude Blackum had a drink together, and then both men left Blackum's cabin about dark and went toward the sawmill. Five hours later the commissary store was robbed and the watchman was killed.

"The mill employees organized a search-party

and had a hand to hand battle with Hitch Diamond inside the lumber yard, and Hitch escaped. The flash-lights were playing on Hitch, and everybody saw him and recognized him.

"After Hitch escaped, Dude Blackum was caught inside the lumber yard, and in attempting to escape by swimming the Mississippi River, Dude was drowned."

"My Lawd!" Skeeter shuddered.

"Now, here is the worst part of it," Flournoy continued. "A stove-pipe hat, a Prince Albert coat, and a yellow waistcoat were found under the steps of the commissary store, and these garments fit Hitch Diamond perfectly, and Hitch admits that they are his. A pair of black trousers, torn at the seat and with one leg split up the front from the bottom almost to the waistband, was found near the scene of the fight in the lumber yard, and this pair of trousers fits Hitch and he admits that the garment is his."

"Oh, Lawdy!" Skeeter shuddered.

"Hitch can give no reason for his visit to Sawtown except that he had never been there and wanted to see the place. He explains the loss of his hat and coat and vest by saying that he surrendered them to a negro whom he had never seen before and whose name he did not know to be hung up in the Sawtown barracks where the homeless workmen sleep. He confesses that he abandoned his trousers in the lumber yard for the purpose of fighting his way through the mob of searchers and escaping.

"Hitch declares that he did not know a human being in Sawtown. Dainty Blackum says that Hitch told her that he had known Dude Blackum for many years. Hitch says he went to Dude Blackum's cabin to get a drink of liquor. Dainty says he pretended to be a negro preacher, and claimed to be much hurt because Dude had not secured him to marry them.

"Hitch admits that he traveled from Sawtown to the Gaitskill hog-camp wearing no garments except his underclothes, and going by night. Old Isaiah Gaitskill says that Hitch came to his cabin in that undressed condition, sick with hunger and exhaustion, and would not permit him to send for a doctor, to inform his wife, or let any of his friends know where he was!"

"My lawdymussy!" Skeeter chattered. The little barkeeper felt as though cold snakes were crawling up and down his spine, and he sat for ten minutes without saying a word. At last Flournoy asked:

"What do you make of it, Skeeter?"

"Marse John," Skeeter protested in a wailing tone, "Hitch Diamond is done cornfessed too much!"

Flournoy understood exactly what he meant.

"Certainly," he said. "Hitch has talked too freely to be guilty—his statements have been too frank. A guilty negro never does that; if he commits a crime, he denies everything to the very last, and offers no explanation for anything."

"Dat's right," Skeeter sighed. "Dat's how he do."

"But you'd have a happy time convincing a jury of Hitch's innocence on the ground that he had talked too much!"

After a long silence, Skeeter asked:

"Whut does you think about dis case, Marse John?"

"I think Hitch was drunk," Flournoy answered. "I doubt if Hitch himself knows whether he committed that crime or not. He talks a lot of stuff about meeting a man on the train, about losing some money, about giving his clothes away, about being stepped on by some man while he was lying asleep in a gulley—all of it a perfect mess. I hate to admit it, but I really believe that Hitch committed the crime while in an intoxicated condition. Dainty Blackum says that he took fourteen swallows of bust-head, pine-top, nigger whisky in her cabin, and that he and Dude took the jug with them when they left."

"My gosh!" Skeeter sighed. "When did de white folks 'terrogate Dainty Blackum?"

"They questioned her in Sawtown the day after Dude was killed by the mob," Flournoy replied. "Dainty is here now—in Ginny Babe Chew's house. I'm keeping watch on her, because she's a material witness."

"When am Hitch's trial gwine be, Marse John?" Skeeter asked.

"It begins a month from next Tuesday," the sheriff said.

"Pore old Hitchy!" Skeeter mourned.

Two big tears rolled down his cheeks and dropped upon his brown hands. His lips began to tremble, and he hid his face with his hat and sat with his shoulders shaking with grief. Finally he said in a mournful voice:

"Hitch is always been de bes' nigger frien' I'm had, Marse John—him an' Vinegar Atts. I wus always a little runt nigger an' I didn't had no kinnery, an' Hitch an' Vinegar, dey always dee-fended me when de yuther nigger-boys pecked on me——"

Skeeter began to sob and sat mourning for his friend as though he were already dead.

Flournoy endured the racket as long as he cared to, then tossed his cigar-stub into a rose-bush, walked down the steps, and climbed into his automobile.

Without a word to Skeeter, he shot down the runway into the street and turned toward the courthouse. In a moment he was swallowed up in a cloud of dust.

XII

HITCH'S MOTHER.

Skeeter sat for two hours turning over the appalling array of facts which the sheriff had set before him for the condemnation of his friend. Nothing seemed to be lacking except Hitch's confession that he had robbed the store and killed the watchman.

"Dis here is awful!" he sighed. "I's gwine over an' git some religium advices from de Revun Vinegar Atts."

He found Vinegar occupying his customary seat under a chinaberry tree in front of the Shoofly Church. Vinegar moved his chair only when the shadow of the tree shifted and the sun shone upon his head. He called this diversion "settin' de sun aroun' de tree."

"Revun," Skeeter began, "I been cornversin' Marse John Flournoy about our chu'ch an' lodge brudder, Hitch Diamond."

"No hope!" Vinegar grumbled. "Hitch is done flirted wid a hearse one time too many. He's as good as dead."

"Cain't we do nothin' fer him?" Skeeter asked.

"We kin save up money in de chu'ch an' de lodge fer a real nice funeral," Vinegar said. "Atter de white folks is done deir wuck, Hitch'll furnish de corp'."

"Is you interrogated any of de white folks?" Skeeter inquired.

"Yes, suh. Marse Tom Gaitskill tole me all I knows. Hitch wucked fer de kunnel, an' kunnel say he's got to git him anodder nigger—de cote-house is gwine spile Hitch!"

"Ain't de kunnel tryin' to he'p Hitch none?" Skeeter asked.

"Naw. What kin be did fer a nigger whut is kotch his tail in a cuttin'-box like Hitch done?"

"I feels sorry fer Hitch, Revun," Skeeter mum-

bled piteously. "Gawd, I'd do anything fer him dat I could!"

"Not me!" Vinegar bellowed. "When de white folks backs off, dat's de sign fer Revun Atts to git away befo' de bust-up comes. Naw, suh, Hitch ain't got no hope!"

Vinegar's voice was a bellow which could be heard a block away. He stood up, took off his stove-pipe preaching hat, and mopped the sweat from the top of his bald head with a big, red handkerchief.

"Naw, suh!" he howled. "You oughter had been to chu'ch dis mawnin' an' heered me orate 'bout Hitch Diamond. I shore preached his funeral good! I tole dem niggers how Hitch went to N'Awleens an' fit in a sinful prize-fight an' got on a big, bust-head drunk an' vamoosed up to Sawtown an' robbed an' kilt, an' is fotch back here now to dis town to show whut happens to de members of de Shoo-fly Chu'ch when dey rambles away from de highways of holiness—whoosh!"

Vinegar broke off with a snort and a flourish, seizing the chair in which he had sat and thrust it up so close to Skeeter's chair that he pinched Skeeter's fingers.

Then he sat down with his thick lips not two inches from Skeeter's ear.

"Listen, Skeeter," he whispered. "Marse Tom Gaitskill an' Sheriff John Flournoy don't think dat Hitch is guilty—dey's bellerin' it aroun' town that Hitch is shore a deader so dey kin hunt fer de real guilty man on de sly!"

"Bless Gawd!" Skeeter grinned.

"I been buttlin' fer Marse Tom ever since Hitch went to N'Awleens, an' I been snoopin' aroun' an' listenin' to deir talk. Marse Tom an' Marse John sot up mighty nigh all night las' Friday talkin' an' smokin' an' cussin' in Marse Tom's dinin'-room. I sot up out on de porch an' listened to 'em. Dey done agree dat de bes' thing fer Hitch is fer eve'ybody not to hab no hope. I agrees wid de white folks."

"Bless Gawd!" Skeeter Butts cackled.

"Git yo' nose on de trail an' sot yo' mouth to howlin' like a houn'-dog, Skeeter," Vinegar grinned. Then, in a bellow which echoed back from the woods in the rear of the church, he howled: "No hope!"

"Dem is de best religium advices you ever orated, Revun," Skeeter cackled as he rose to his feet. "I's gwine turn detecative right dis minute an' snoop aroun' seein' how much I kin find out!"

He walked straight to the courthouse and entered the sheriff's office.

"Could I be allowed to see Hitch, Marse John?" he asked.

"Certainly. Any of his colored friends may see him if they come at a reasonable time. I'll admit you to the jail."

When Skeeter was admitted and locked behind the bars of the jail, and saw Hitch Diamond pacing up and down the corridor in the second story, the only occupant of the prison, he found to his annoyance that he could not begin a word

of conversation with his lifelong friend. When talking to others, he could speak about Hitch and his misfortune with great volubility, but face to face with Hitch, what was there to say?

The two sat down, Skeeter laid a package of cigarettes upon the seat of a chair beside them, and after that for twenty minutes there was perfect silence. Not a word had been spoken except their first brief and embarrassed greetings. Each sat, smoking furiously, and lighting a fresh cigarette upon the stub of the old one.

At last Skeeter managed to speak, and made the one request which opened the floodgates of Hitch Diamond's talk:

"Tell me all about it, Hitchy. Don't leave out no little thing."

Hitch dropped his cigarette at his feet and began.

For two hours his low voice rumbled on, the narrative beginning from the moment he left Tickfall to go to New Orleans to the prize-fight and progressing with minute particularity to the moment when he sat in the jail beside Skeeter Butts.

Skeeter listened with a heart as heavy as lead. It seemed to him that Hitch had confessed everything except the actual commission of the crime of murder and robbery. The array of proof which Flournoy had was sustained and established in every particular by Hitch's story. Vinegar had fired his hopes for a moment by betraying the secret that the white folks were unconvinced of Hitch's guilt and were hunting for the perpetrator

of the deed. But Skeeter knew when Hitch had finished his story that Hitch would pay the penalty for his crime.

Not a word did Skeeter utter until the narrative was ended. Then he arose and held out his hand.

"Good-by, Hitch," he said, with a catch in his voice. He walked down the steps, and the jailer opened the door and let him out.

Passing across the courthouse yard he met Sheriff Flournoy.

"Marse John," he said, "you tole me dat Hitch wus borned on yo' plantation. Does you know who his maw is?"

"Certainly."

"Is his maw livin' yit?"

"Yes."

"I ain't never heerd Hitch say nothin' 'bout his maw," Skeeter remarked.

"Hitch don't know who his mother is," Flournoy smiled. "I doubt if she knows that Hitch is her son."

"How come?" Skeeter asked.

"Hitch's mother committed a little crime the year before I was elected sheriff. Hitch was then one year old. His mother abandoned him—ran off and stayed away for thirty years. Hitch was taken care of by the other negroes on the plantation, and all who once knew who Hitch's mother is are now either dead or have gone away from here."

"Fer Gawd's sake, Marse John!" Skeeter

wailed. "Why don't you tell Hitch who his maw am? Who is she?"

Flournoy considered this question while he took the time to light a fresh cigar. Then he asked:

"If I tell you who Hitch's mother is, will you promise never to reveal it?"

"I promises!" Skeeter exclaimed.

"His mother is Ginny Babe Chew!" the sheriff told him.

Skeeter reeled back from the shock, and an exclamation shot from his throat like a bullet.

He turned round and round like a man who was dazed, uttering a series of highly profane expletives like the crackling of thorns under a pot.

"You asked me why I didn't tell Hitch who his mother was," the sheriff continued, as he started away. "I think you know the answer!"

Ginny Babe Chew!

Like a panorama the events of the Sunday before passed before his dazed and horrified vision —Ginny Babe Chew, shrieking, cursing, whooping, thrusting the people aside and pressing up behind the sheriff's horse, howling after her son the charge of "Murder! Murder! Murder!" Again he saw her struck down by the massive fist of Vinegar Atts, the blood streaming from her lips, the mob splitting into halves as they walked past her, while she groaned and cursed, groveling in the dust. Again he saw her staggering down the street, the blood reddening the front of her dress and making a red froth upon her lips, as she stood in front of the jail tossing dust into the air, gyrating, shriek-

ing, cursing, and wailing, "Good-by, Hitch! Good-by, Hitch!"

What a mother for any man to have!

Skeeter staggered across the courthouse yard, wiping the clammy sweat from his temples.

"Marse John made me promise not to tell nobody who Hitch's maw is. Ef I wus to tell dat fack, de white folks would hang Hitch Diamond befo' night. Dat's de awfullest fack agin him yit!"

In front of the post-office he met Vinegar Atts.

"Revun Atts," Skeeter said earnestly, "ef you know any good religium advices to gib to a nigger whut is about to die, fer de Lawd sake go preach 'em to Hitch Diamond. De white folks is got him—got him good!"

XIII

THE HOODOO FACE.

The sunshine lay hot upon the sand in the negro settlement called Dirty-Six when Dainty Blackum arose from her bed, dressed, and walked out into the yard. In the rear of Ginny Babe Chew's house was a large number of fig and pecan-trees, and under the shade of one of these trees, patiently waiting and smoking a cigarette, was Skeeter Butts.

For a moment Dainty was surprised; then she reflected that she had expected some man to be there that morning, as some man had been there

every morning, and she would have been disappointed if she had not found one.

But Skeeter Butts had never been there before. She had heard that he was very susceptible to the charms of women, but up to this time she had received the devoted attention of only two men—Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg.

She came over and sat down beside Skeeter.

"Yistiddy wus a busy day fer me, Skeeter," she began. "Two men tole me dey loved me an' axed me to marry 'em. Dat's a pretty good starter."

Skeeter had entertained no idea of making love to Dainty when he called to see her, having had an entirely different purpose. But as he did not know exactly how to approach the subject which he wished to discuss, he decided to follow her line of conversation, hoping to direct it at a later time.

"Yes'm, dat's so," Skeeter remarked without enthusiasm. "De fack is, I wus so busy dat I looked over de chance to ax you to marry me yistiddy, so I comed early dis mawnin' to git in a word 'bout dat——"

"I tole de two yuther men dey wus losin' time, an' I tells you dat same word in eggsvance."

"Of co'se, I don't expeck you to fall right in wid dat suggestion," Skeeter hastened to say. "But I wants you to know whut way I is leanin'."

"You done took a notion to lean mighty sudden," Dainty snapped. "You better lean de yuther way. You ain't able to suppote no wife."

"Whut's de use of gittin' able to suppote some-

pin you ain't got?" Skeeter asked absently. "Us owns a hoss befo' us buys any hoss-feed."

The girl made no reply.

After a while Skeeter added another remark in an absent-minded way:

"Sometimes niggers buys a hoss an' depen's on stealin' de hoss-feed. Dey always gits in trouble wid de white folks, too, when dey does dat."

Instantly the girl's manner changed completely. She bit her lips and her hands began to tremble. She looked as if dizziness and weakness were about to overcome her.

"When a nigger gits in trouble wid de white folks, it's all off wid him," Skeeter blundered on, his mind upon Hitch Diamond, and all unconscious of the impression he was making upon the girl beside him. "Sometimes luck is wid him an' he kin run off, but most often he——"

Suddenly Skeeter broke off and looked at Dainty with popping eyes. For the moment he had forgotten the tragedy in the girl's life, and now he was struck speechless, and merely sat there and stared and gasped. At last he murmured:

"I done slopped de wrong pig!"

"Dat's right, Skeeter," the girl said in a bitter tone. "De best thing you kin do is to ramble outen dis yard an' don't come back no more."

"I didn't mean nothin', Dainty," Skeeter said humbly. "I's done had a heap of trouble, an' it 'pears like I ain't got my real good sense."

"Dat's a fack," Dainty said.

"I won't never do it no mo'," Skeeter pleaded.

"Dat's a fack," Dainty announced. She arose and walked into the house.

Skeeter remained seated upon the bench, trying to think up some way to square himself with the girl, but his mind would not work with its usual facility.

Then in the yard on the other side of the house there was a loud, angry squall, followed by the wild, frightened squawking of a hen, and Ginny Babe Chew waddled around to where Skeeter was sitting.

At the corner of the house there was a barrel of rain-water setting under a gutter-spout, and into this water Ginny Babe ducked the hen viciously a number of times.

She tossed the hen on the ground, where it lay gasping for air and half drowned.

Skeeter sat and cackled like another hen.

"Shut up, you little devil!" Ginny Babe squalled. "I'll ketch you an' do you de same way!"

"Whut ails de hen, Ginny?" Skeeter laughed.

"She wants to sot, an' I ain't got no eggs to put under her," Ginny whooped. "I locked her up in de wood-house an' she foun' a ole china door-knob an' sot on dat. I put her in de corn-crib an' she sot down on a lot of corn-cobs an' tried to hatch 'em out. I's ducked her in dat barrel of water 'bout fo'teen times, an' it ain't done no good whatsumever. I never *did* see such a fool!"

"Why don't you try on somepin else?" Skeeter giggled.

"Whut's dat?" Ginny whooped.

"Pour a leetle coal-ile on her tail an' sot it on fire," Skeeter snickered. "I figger she won't sot no more atter dat."

"By gosh, I'll do it!" Ginny Babe howled.

She walked over and pushed the hen with her foot.

"You don't git no coal-ile on yo' tail yit!" she bellowed. "But as soon as dem feathers gits dry, I got a good mind to try it!"

Skeeter looked at Ginny Babe Chew, and a cold chill ran down his spine. She was the one woman in Tickfall of whom every negro was afraid. She was a wicked, vicious, horrible old woman, whose little, green pig eyes glowed poisonously through the rolls of facial flesh. She possessed an ugly and venomous laugh, and generally ended her profane and vicious remarks with an irritating chuckle.

Ginny knew the history of all the people in Tickfall parish, both white and black, and most of her conversation on ordinary occasions was a discussion of their characters. She especially loved to drive nails in the coffins of moribund reputations.

Now she sat down heavily and began a conversation upon her favorite theme.

"I done wucked in de house of eve'y white man in dis parish whut is able to hire he'p," she bawled. "I knows all de fambly secrets, an' I done got my little, bullet eye on all de fambly skelingtons. I's made acquaintance wid all de niggers in dis parish, too, an' I tells you dis—some niggers is bad, an' yuther niggers is wusser; but dar ain't no good

niggers, livin' or dead! I knows 'em! So I spends my happy old age findin' out all de bad I kin about 'em!"

"Yes'm," Skeeter gasped, looking at her with frightened eyes.

"All you niggers in Tickfall—whoof!" the old woman exploded.

"I hopes we is as good as most niggers," Skeeter said timidly.

"Whoof!" the old woman exploded again. "Does you want me to tell you whut I knows about *you*, Skeeter Butts?"

"Fer Gawd's sake, no'm!" Skeeter quavered. "My memory is powerful good."

The woman's fat body shook with silent laughter and her little pig eyes glowed like emeralds. She laid a heavy, fat hand on Skeeter's knee.

"I's got a hoodoo face, Skeeter!" she bawled. "When a nigger looks at my fat mug, all de meanness in him comes right out on his face so I kin read it like de white folks reads a book. Yes, suh, I got a hoodoo face!"

While Skeeter Butts sat beside her and trembled, wondering what to say, and very much wishing himself somewhere else, Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg came around to the side of the house where they were sitting.

"You want me to cornfess yo' sins fer you, Dinner Gaze?" Ginny Babe howled, turning her green eyes upon him.

"You don't know nothin'." Dinner asserted, gazing at her with his beady eyes without a trace

of fear, his black, dough-like face as expressionless as when Hitch Diamond had first seen it.

"Whoof!" the old woman exploded the third time. Shifting her mountainous fat to her feet and standing up, she glared at Dinner Gaze in a perfect fury; then, to Skeeter's surprise, her voice changed completely from its bellowing tone to an intonation as soft as Dinner's own. She muttered aloud, looking at Dinner with intent gaze as if she were seeing him for the first time:

"Naw, suh, I don't know nothin' agin you!"

"I gambles fer a livin'," Dinner grinned. "Dat ain't no highbrow job. I follers de races an' hangs aroun' prize-fighters, an' drinks a little booze an' plays a little craps an' coon-can, but I ain't got nothin' to hide from nobody."

"Dar now!" Ginny whooped in a triumphant voice. "Didn't I jes' tole you dat I had a hoodoo face? Nobody kin look at me an' hide deir sins!"

"I ain't allowin' nobody to low-rate me, neither," Tucky Sugg proclaimed. "You wanter cornfess my sins, Sister Ginny?"

Ginny broke out into a loud, whooping laugh. "You ain't got no sins, Tucky," she guffawed. "You ain't nothin' but a idjut—an' no limb didn't fall on you, neither. You was nachel-bawned dat way. Idjuts ain't responsible!"

Chuckling to herself, she picked up her fast-reviving hen, carried it back to a large hen-house on the other side of her home, and threw it inside the door. Closing the door she waddled back, and waved a fat hand at the three men. "Don't

fergit dat Ginny's got a hoodoo face, niggers!" she bawled.

"Huh!" Dinner Gaze grunted. "Listen to dat ole fat fool!"

"Come on, niggers," Tucky Sugg said in a disgusted tone. "Less git away from dis place."

As the three men walked down the street, Skeeter said: "Dinner, is you ever had any expe'unce 'tendin' bar?"

"Yes, suh."

"Would you wish to he'p Pap Curtain take keer of my saloom fer de nex' ten days?" he asked next.

"It'll suit me fine," Dinner told him.

They discussed the business for a little while, then Skeeter left them at the next corner.

"I leaves it wid you an' Pap, Dinner," Skeeter said. "I needs a leetle rest an' I's gwine to trabbel some."

XIV

SKEETER STARTS A BLAZE.

For the next four days Pap Curtain and Dinner Gaze tended bar in the Hen-Scratch saloon for Skeeter Butts.

Vinegar Atts and Tucky Sugg started a protracted meeting in the old Shoofly Church which was attended by throngs who listened with bated breath to Vinegar's bawling exhortations to righteousness based upon the horrible example of Hitch

Diamond, who found himself in a predicament where there was "no hope."

Meanwhile Skeeter went to New Orleans, and to Sawtown. He tracked Hitch Diamond from the moment he left Tickfall to go to the prize-fight until he returned to Tickfall, bareheaded, barefooted, with his hands manacled behind him, and under the escort of the officers of the law.

In both places he dodged Sheriff John Flournoy, who was also conducting an investigation. Both were on the same mission, and Skeeter saw Flournoy a dozen times at different places.

Skeeter and Flournoy returned to Tickfall, crushed and hopeless, appalled at the array of evidence which Hitch Diamond had to confront at his coming trial. It was not a pretense, but a fact, that Hitch Diamond had no hope.

It was almost dark when Skeeter climbed wearily off the train at Tickfall and started up the street toward Dirty-Six. He overtook Sheriff John Flournoy walking slowly up the street.

"Whut is Hitch's chances now, Marse John?" he asked.

"He has none," Flournoy replied. "There is no longer a shadow of doubt in my mind that Hitch Diamond committed the crime with which he is charged."

"Yes, suh, dat's de way it looks," Skeeter agreed sadly. He dropped behind, stopped, and let the sheriff go on alone. He stood leaning against a fence for a while, wondering what to do next. Finally he said to himself:

"I's gwine to Ginny Babe Chew's cabin an' narrate her all I is found out. Mebbe dat ole hoodoo face kin see mo' hope dan I kin."

He passed the Hen-Scratch saloon and peeped into the window, where he saw Pap and Dinner Gaze playing cards at a small table. He passed the Shoofly Church, where he heard the voice of Vinegar Atts bellowing like a lost cow. On the edge of the settlement he entered the yard of Ginny Babe Chew's home, and found Dainty sitting alone upon the porch.

Ginny Babe was in the hen-house rendering profane ministrations to the same old hen which was still of a mind to brood, whether there was anything to hatch or not.

That hen had entertained Ginny Babe for a week. She had exhausted every known method to break up the fowl's desire to "set," dousing it in water, ducking it in ashes, tying a long red trailer of wool to its feet, and other things of that general nature. Now she stood growling profanity, wondering what else she could do to the obstinate old biddy.

Suddenly she thought of the suggestion made by Skeeter Butts: "Pour coal-ile on her tail an' sot her on fire!"

She picked up an old rag lying in the yard, wrapped it around the squawking hen's tail, carried the fowl to the back porch, where she found an oil-can, and saturated the rag well with the petroleum.

Then she struck a match and set the rag afire.

The startled hen fluttered out of her arms, ran straight into the hen-house, shed the oil-soaked, blazing rag with most of her tail feathers, and ran out of the hen-house into the high weeds.

But the burning rag left in the hen-house got busy with the loose straw and the other dry trash, and in a moment the whole house was in a blaze!

Ginny was famous for the noise she could make with her throat. Her very name was a perversion of the word for that noisy hen the guinea, and from her earliest childhood this word had been indicative of her chief faculty. But on this occasion she broke all previous records for racket.

"Fire! Fire! Fire!" she began.

What she said after that and the noises she made cannot enter into this narrative because they cannot be reproduced in print.

The dry grass, the straw, the inflammable trash, the dusty accumulations of years, due to Ginny's idea that the way to clean up her yard was to sweep everything inside the hen-house—all was afire and blazing merrily.

Skeeter and Dainty heard her wails and ran around the house. Then Skeeter grabbed a tree with both hands, spread his alligator mouth to its utmost limit, and laughed himself into hysterics.

The portion of Tickfall occupied by the whites had water-works, and adequate fire protection. The negro settlement known as Dirty-Six had no water, but was protected from fire by a chemical engine. There was a fire-engine house, a pole

beside it with a bell on top, and a rope suspended from the bell within reach of the hand.

When the engine-house was first erected four years before, the negroes had waited rather impatiently for some one's house to catch on fire. They wanted to see their new engine in operation. Nothing caught fire, not even a chicken-coop. For four years the bell at the engine-house had not been rung.

Then, on some occasion which called for a celebration on the part of the negroes, they had asked and had been given permission to take the chemical wagon out, attach the hose, and sprinkle the street, merely to show that the hose would actually squirt water and the engine pump it.

After the celebration the apparatus was dragged back and placed in the engine-house, and the inhabitants of Dirty-Six resumed their watchful waiting.

Now the cry of "Fire!" echoed through the settlement.

It was caught up on every corner. Negroes seized their shotguns and pistols and ran down the street, firing them into the air—the fire-signal in all Southern villages.

Vinegar Atts, standing in the pulpit of the Shoofly Church, paused in the midst of a fiery exhortation, listened to the cry of "Fire!" ringing through the settlement.

"Fire!" Vinegar bellowed, and started in a lope for the street, leading all the congregation in the race. They, with the other inhabitants of

Dirty-Six, gladly assembled, not at the scene of the fire, but at the engine-house!

"Ring de bell!" a hundred voices bawled.

The bell-rope was gone. Some little piccaninny had needed a rope to tie his dog and had helped himself.

Two or three boys tried to climb the post and ring the bell, but they could not reach it.

"Open de door an' fotch out de engyne!" the crowd whooped.

Forty men ran their hands into their pockets and brought them out empty. They did not have the key to the door. They had never had the key. The action was mechanical and unconscious.

Who had the key? No one knew. It had been two years since any one had entered the building. The door was locked and the key was lost.

"Bust de door down!" was the next call from the crowd.

Strong shoulders were pressed against the fragile door, and the crash of its timbers was answered by the shouts of the people and the on-rush of the crowd. They laid hold upon the rope and pulled the machine to the scene of the fire.

Down the alley by the side of the house they ran, broke down the fence and pulled the machine into the yard. With many shouts they unwound the hose, attached it to the engine, turned the faucets and began to pump.

From the hose came a long whistling sound of air:

"Whee-ee-ee-e!"

Not a drop of chemical water. The celebration two years before had exhausted the chemical, and the engine had never been recharged. The hen-house burned without interruption.

Ginny Babe Chew turned toward that crowd of heroic negro firemen, and the pumps of her profanity worked without a hitch as she poured out a stream of sulphurous and vitriolic language upon their luckless heads. Skeeter Butts still hung to the tree with both hands, laughing with whoops like a yelling Comanche.

The firemen laid hold upon their chemical machine and dragged it out of the yard.

Suddenly Skeeter's laughter ended with a gurgle of choked surprise. With his mouth still open wide, he gazed upward at a little dormer window which looked out of the attic of Ginny Babe Chew's home. Slowly his hair rose up on his head, and cold chills ran down his spine.

The light reflected from the burning hen-house clearly revealed a male human face at the dormer window!

The man was looking down into the yard, watching the crowd, watching the fire, and at times grinning at something he saw. Skeeter watched that face for two or three minutes; its clear outlines were stamped indelibly upon his mind. He had never seen the negro before!

Then he sprang to the side of Vinegar Atts and squalled:

"Come on up-stairs wid me, Vinegar—quick!"

The two ran into the house. Skeeter took his

automatic pistol from his pocket, and leading the way, ran up the little, narrow stairs which led to the attic. They pushed open the door of the room and entered.

The room was empty!

Skeeter ran to the window and looked out, just as he had seen the strange negro do. Instantly the fat face of Ginny Babe Chew was raised to the window, her green pig eyes glowed malevolently, and her fat fists were clenched and raised in malediction.

"Come out of dat attic, you little yellow-faced debbil!" she whooped. "I'll bust yo' neck!"

XV

COUNSEL FOR THE DEFENSE.

On the first Tuesday in September the open spaces in front and on the sides of the Tickfall courthouse filled up early with a crowd of negroes. It was the occasion of the opening of the criminal term of the district court, and all witnesses and talesmen were called to court for the trial of Hitch Diamond, charged with murder, against the peace and dignity of the commonwealth of Louisiana and the statutes made and provided.

The witnesses and talesmen already sat in the court-room, along with as many other people, mostly colored, as could squeeze in there. Even now, at nine o'clock in the morning, the heat of that ill-ventilated room was stifling, the odor was

overpowering. Men sat on the bench seats, on the back of the benches, on the ledges of the windows; they stood in the aisles, in the corridors, on the stairways, and were ranged in rows along the soiled and dusty walls.

Inside the low railing which divided the room, and nearest to the chairs which the jurors were to occupy, Hitch Diamond sat at a long table with Goldie Curtain by his side. In that crowd of people, either white or black, Goldie was the one splotch of vivid coloring—her face and hands and neck a beautiful orange in color, and her half-caste beauty most striking and attractive. Hitch sat beside the table as stolid and indifferent as a wooden man, but Goldie trembled, her nervous fingers plaited in and out of each other like squirming snakes; she was scared and shrinking, pitiable and lonely.

Just outside the low railing sat Ginny Babe Chew and Dinner Gaze, directly behind the broad back of Hitch Diamond. Ginny slowly slapped at her fat face with a turkey-wing fan. Her big mouth was clamped shut like a steel trap, and her little green, greedy, pig eyes glared through the rolls of facial fat with baleful, condemning gaze upon everything and everybody around her.

A little farther away from Hitch, but on the same front seat with Ginny Chew and Dinner Gaze, sat the Reverend Vinegar Atts and Tucky Sugg.

There was a window behind the jury-box, so that the light falling over the heads of the jurors

would fall full upon the faces of the witnesses as they sat in the chair, and would illumine every line in the faces of the lawyers as they presented their sides to the jury.

On the opposite side of the room there was another window, and within this window, sitting precariously on the ledge, was Pap Curtain. He had asked and obtained permission from Sheriff Flournoy to sit within the bar on the ground that it was his son-in-law who was being tried for his life.

Across from Hitch Diamond the district attorney sat at another long table to represent the cause of the State. Tall, urbane, white-haired, with the reputation of being a pitiless prosecutor of criminals, Dan Davazec was confident and jaunty. He fussed about busily, arranging and rearranging the table in front of him, shoving aside the water-pitcher, the ink-bottle, a pile of law-books with freckled-leather covers, as a battleship strips her decks for action.

"It's a cinch, Sam," he chuckled to the editor of the Tickfall *Whoop*. "Dead open-and-shut!"

Davazec had tried in vain to find a wife, or mother, or sisters of the night-watchman for whose murder Hitch Diamond was to be tried. He wanted somebody to lend force and eloquence to his plea by sitting before the jury dressed in black and wearing a long, thick mourning veil. But the murdered man apparently had no kinsmen, so Davazec lacked these eloquent figures of desolation and sorrow.

But the two owners of the Sawtown mill sat at the table beside Davazec, and the room in the rear of the judge's bench was crowded with witnesses. Davazec felt the importance of his place and the certain triumph of his cause, and he swelled and expanded in his clothes at the thought of how helpful this day's proceedings would be to him when he announced himself for reëlection.

From his office in the rear the judge entered the court-room, followed by a clerk bearing a few law-books and some sheets of paper and a large palm-leaf fan. Judge Haddan was a pale, sickly looking man with a weak voice, trembling hands, and stooped shoulders. But his head was massive and Websterian, and his eyes glowed like the eyes of some jungle beast. No man within the borders of the State commanded more respect as a lawyer and a jurist.

Hitch Diamond raised his massive head and eyed the judge with the stolid gaze of a stupid horse. Goldie gasped, and laced and interlaced her nervous fingers in her lap.

The opening ceremonies of the court were soon over. No one paid any attention to the few formalities, for they were all hastening to get at the thing of big interest.

The clerk called the case of the Commonwealth *versus* Hitch Diamond.

"We are ready, your honor," Dan Davazec said in his clear voice.

"Where is your counsel, Hitch Diamond?" Judge Haddan asked.

"I ain't got none, boss," Hitch answered.

"Do you wish me to assign you counsel?" Haddan inquired.

Hitch stood up and scratched his woolly head.

"Boss," he said, in a sad tone, "one time when yo' leetle gal got sick an' you lived out on yo' plantation in de country, I done you a leetle favor. Does you remember, boss?"

Haddan looked straight at Hitch Diamond while his nervous fingers drummed upon the arms of his chair. He seemed not to have heard what Hitch had said.

"Do you wish me to assign you counsel?" he asked again.

"Boss," Hitch continued, "when yo' little gal got sick, de water had done riz up an' de Dorfoche Bayou wus seben miles wide—an' you axed me to go atter de dorctor. I waded an' swum dat bayou —I got acrost dat seben mile of water—I fotch de dorctor—an' yo' little gal got well. Boss, you tole me den, dat ef I ever needed any he'p, you would he'p me at any cost—an' boss, befo' Gawd, now is yo time!"

Hitch Diamond sat down at the table.

Involuntarily Judge Haddan looked at the State's attorney; their eyes met, and Davazec murmured, "Don't that nigger beat hell!"

"Do you wish me to assign counsel for you, Hitch?" Judge Haddan asked for the third time.

"Naw, suh, boss!" Hitch said. "I think you an' me had better law dis case togedder!"

"Do you plead guilty or not guilty?" Haddan asked.

Hitch grinned.

"Ain't dat jes' whut we is come to try, boss?" he asked.

"The defendant pleads not guilty!" Judge Haddan announced with an amused grimace at the State's attorney.

Then the clerk called the name of a talesman.

In an hour the jury was complete. Hitch Diamond left that work entirely in the hands of Dan Davazec and Judge Haddan. Whenever the judge excused a talesman from service, Hitch smiled, and felt that the judge was certainly winning the case for him!

Then for two hours the crowded court-room of people sat in breathless silence, while District Attorney Davazec drove nail after nail into the gallows which should hang Hitch Diamond. It was a savage and pitiless prosecution, not because of the efforts of Davazec, but because of the force of the testimony, developing a chain of evidence without a weak or missing link. The jurors, grim, silent, attentive, fixed their eyes upon each witness, and when the witness-chair was empty, they looked down at the floor.

Not one of them glanced at Hitch Diamond. Jurymen don't like to watch a man whom they are making up their minds to condemn to death.

Hitch listened to the evidence without a word or question to a single witness. If Judge Haddan asked a question, Hitch grinned. He seemed

never to comprehend the effect of the statements that were being made.

Dan Davazec arose and announced with dramatic emphasis:

"Your honor, the State closes!"

The crowd in the court-room drew a long breath; a humming murmur like a breeze in the tree-tops swept over the heads of the people.

Hitch Diamond arose.

"Boss," he announced to the judge, "Mister Danny Davazec is shore done hisse'f proud, an' all dem white men is tole de truth—as fur as dey knows it. I closes up de State's case, too!"

A snicker sounded from the rear benches, where an assortment of white toughs and loafers had congregated for gratuitous entertainment.

The jury stared at the floor.

XVI

WITNESS FOR THE DEFENSE.

"Have you any witnesses, Hitch?" Judge Haddan inquired, nervously mopping at his temples with a handkerchief.

"Yes, suh. I wants to 'terrogate Skeeter Butts, please, suh."

There was a slight movement in the crowd in the rear of the court-room, and Skeeter came forward and pushed open the little gate in the low railing, which, like a river levee, held back an overflow of black people.

He had moved slowly through the crowd, proud of being called as a witness, ostentatiously speaking to every colored person he knew, and bowing with fine courtesy to every white face.

Respectably dressed, and extremely respectful in his manner, Skeeter came to the witness stand with the air of a man who knew exactly how to act in the company of white folks.

The jurors straightened up in their seats, looking at Skeeter with interest, wondering what light he could bring to brighten the black cloud which hung over the defendant. Skeeter noted the movement and bowed.

"Mawnin', gen'lemens!" he murmured.

At the admonition of the judge, Skeeter held up his right hand, a clerk rattled off a string of words which Skeeter could not understand, and Skeeter dropped his hand.

"Thank 'e, suh!" he said.

Then, for the first time during the trial, Hitch Diamond came to life.

He rose to his feet, picked up the heavy table against which he had been leaning, and set it entirely out of his way by placing it so close to the witness stand that Skeeter Butts could have reached out his foot from the chair and stepped on it.

A heavy iron cuspidor stood in the middle of the space which Hitch was clearing for himself, so he set it out of his way. After that he moved two heavy chairs.

Suddenly Sheriff John Flournoy woke up!

It looked to him like Hitch Diamond had

cleared a space for himself clear across the courtroom in front of the judge to the open window where Pap Curtain, Hitch's father-in-law, was sitting. He noticed that Pap Curtain had slipped off the window ledge and was standing with his back to the window, one hand stretched out on either side.

Hitch was getting ready to run!

As quietly as possible, Sheriff Flournoy slipped across the platform behind the judge's seat and stationed himself near the window where Pap Curtain stood.

Pap smiled and nodded knowingly.

"Dat's right, Marse John," he grinned, as he waved his hand toward Hitch Diamond. "Git a good ready! Dat Tickfall Tiger is gwine scratch somebody's back!"

Having completed his preparations, Hitch Diamond turned to his star witness.

"Whut am yo' name, Skeeter Butts?" he bellowed.

Skeeter got mad and began to swell up.

"You done called me by my name!" he snapped.

"Tell de white folks whut is yo' name, Skeeter!" Hitch growled. "Mebbe dey is seed yo' favor but disremember de name of yo' face!"

"Skeeter Butts!" the witness replied grumpily.

"Does you know who kilt dat night-watchman down at Sawtown?" Hitch asked.

"Suttinly."

"Was you dar when it happened?" Hitch inquired.

"Naw, suh."

"Was it me whut done it?" Hitch bellowed.

"Naw, suh," Skeeter answered positively.

"Who done it?" Hitch Diamond howled.

Skeeter hitched himself forward until he sat upon the extreme edge of the witness chair. He hung his brown derby hat upon the first finger of his left hand and turned it round and round with the finger and thumb of his right hand. He stared at the table which Hitch had lifted and placed before him.

The members of the jury suddenly sat up and took notice.

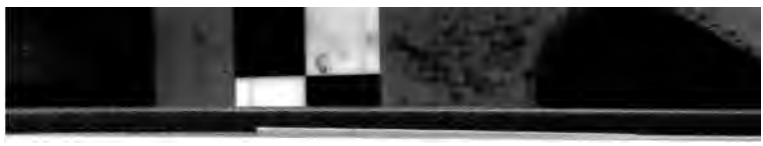
They had known negroes all their lives; they had had negro playmates when they were boys; and now they "read sign" on Skeeter. They knew Skeeter was going to explode something. Their backbones stiffened in their chairs as if the marrow had suddenly turned to rigid steel.

"Who—done—it?" Hitch Diamond bellowed.

Skeeter pushed himself back in his chair. His little brown derby hat fell from his finger, rattled and bounced in a ridiculous fashion across the table before him, fell to the floor and rocked to and fro on the curved crown.

Skeeter stretched out his hand with two middle fingers and the thumb flexed, and the first finger and the little finger extended in such a way that he pointed at the same time with one gesture to two men sitting in different parts of the court-room. Then he answered:

"Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg!"



Judge Haddan slumped forward in his chair, his delicate, fragile hands gripping the edge of the desk before him. The district attorney, a man who generally possessed perfect poise and self-possession, was jerked to his feet by this announcement and stood in absolute silence waving his hands to and fro like an embarrassed schoolboy who had suddenly forgotten how to "speak his piece." The jury sank back in their chairs with a low sigh of gratification. They had tuned their ears for the sound of an explosion, and the effect had produced a pleasant shock.

Silence in the court-room, a silence appalling.

Hitch Diamond, who had been standing like a statue carved from ebony, slowly turned and faced the crowd of black men sitting behind him.

Then a voice cracked the silence like a starter's pistol shot over the backs of two men straining for a race; it was the voice of Ginny Babe Chew:

"Dar—now!"

In the twenty seconds which had elapsed since Skeeter made his astounding statement, Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg had both considered the chances and the avenues of escape, as well as the possibility of remaining in their places and protesting innocence of the charge. Ginny Babe Chew's triumphant exclamation decided the issue.

The low railing around the bar was directly before them. They sprang forward to clear it, and lo! Vinegar Atts was swinging to Tucky Sugg's coat-tail, and Ginny Babe Chew was hanging to the coat-tail of Dinner Gaze!

In an instant each man had slipped his arms out of his coat and was free. They leaped the railing, standing in the open space which Hitch Diamond had so ostentatiously cleared.

Under their coats, the two men carried pistol holsters, and now they stood with their backs against the wall beside the judge's bench, at bay, each with a pistol in his hand.

There was confusion for about ten seconds while the court-room cleared of its occupants. It took just that long for all to get out who wanted to go. That was sufficient time for some eager ones to pass the post-office two blocks away!

Suddenly Dinner Gaze's dangerous, desperate voice rang out clearly, with an intonation which pierced like a sword:

"Don't come dis way, white folks! Ef you do, you better come a-shootin' an' pick out yo' grave befo' you starts!"

XVII

SMOKE OF BATTLE.

By terrible and evil ways, the reckless feet of Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg had come to that cleared space in the Tickfall court-room. In the next few minutes, they were going to make Tickfall history.

No man knew this better than the sheriff, the district attorney, the judge of the district court, and the jurors, as each man stood in his place

and planned his part in the coming battle. The negro is the deadliest fighter on earth—when he makes up his mind to fight.

Sheriff Flournoy raised his gun—and the fight was on. With a motion as easy and as mechanical as the gesture of a man flecking a speck of dust from his cuff, Dinner Gaze turned his hand and shot back. The two guns spoke simultaneously.

With an oath, Sheriff Flournoy dropped his useless gun at his feet—the bullet from Dinner Gaze's pistol had struck it and put it permanently out of business.

Hitch Diamond snarled like an angry beast. By a thrust of his foot, he turned over the table before which Skeeter Butts sat, making a barrier for himself. At the same instant of time, he hurled a heavy chair straight at Dinner Gaze, who stood grinning, leering at Sheriff Flournoy, who was now weaponless.

Hitch dropped down behind the table as a bullet splashed through the wood two inches above him, and also splashed every juryman out of the box like a big flat rock falling in a puddle of mud!

Skeeter Butts jerked a pistol from his coat pocket and tossed it to Hitch Diamond. Lifting with his powerful left arm, Hitch held up that heavy table as a shield between him and his enemies, and crashed forward toward Gaze and Sugg, shooting as he went. Falling, he shot again; sprawling upon the floor, he raised himself above the table and shot still again.

Once more Hitch Diamond charged forward,

drawing closer to the fighting pair, staggering with his heavy table as a shield, economical with his gun-fire, waiting for a chance to kill, blazing, terrible, alone, moving toward the flash and smoke and rattle of the two guns barking from the hands of the two men who stood with their backs against the wall with leering grins upon their faces.

The unarmed men in the court-room dodged behind the furniture and crawled under the seats, shuddering at the fury of battle, as the bullets tore the plastering from the ceiling and the walls, splintered the furniture, ricocheted around the room, smashing windows and the glass globes of the electric lights.

In less time than it takes to tell it, Hitch's last bullet was fired and he snapped his empty gun into the faces of his enemies. At nearly the same moment Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg threw aside their own empty and useless weapons.

With a loud bellow, Hitch Diamond tossed the table from him, breaking off the two legs on one side. He sprang around, and in and out, striking blows which had made him famous in the pugilistic ring all over the State. He struck and parried and struck again, pounding, pounding at the faces of the two shrieking men who fought at him with weapons mightier than their fists, for they were fighting with the legs of the table which Hitch had broken off when he tossed his improvised shield aside!

There was a rush of help coming to the aid of Hitch Diamond—Sheriff Flournoy, the district

attorney, the two mill owners, a court-clerk, twelve jurors, Skeeter Butts, and Vinegar Atts.

Then began a noise of shouting and tumult, oaths, curses; shrieking, horrible, blood-stained faces, snarling lips and gnashing teeth, and Hitch Diamond fought on, leading the hosts who stood for law and justice. Pain tore at his bruised and bleeding face, blood streamed from his hands and arms, his mighty, heaving chest left stains of red upon his white shirt bosom.

Men fell, and Hitch stepped on them. Hitch fell, and men stepped on him. All men slipped and slid in blood, crushed each other, dragged each other down, struck each other—and all heaved and cursed and shouted and hammered and tore at the shuddering tangle of human flesh and bone.

Standing on a chair close to the struggling men was a woman—a woman of wicked, half-caste beauty, her long Indian hair streaming down her back, her golden-colored hands weaving to and fro with clenched fists, her golden face blazing with hate and fury—fit mate for Hitch Diamond, whose wife she was.

Her voice rang like a trumpet:

"Kill 'em, Hitchie! Kill 'em! Kill 'em! Kill 'em!"

Such a brutal, demoniacal struggle could not endure long. Vinegar Atts was senseless. Skeeter Butts lay flat on his back against the wall with the blood streaming from an ugly cut upon his head. Three of the jurors nursed broken arms,

and several more had retired from the fray disabled by their injuries.

Sheriff Flournoy lay on the floor with the blood flowing from a wound on his neck. He crawled over and picked up the pistol which Skeeter Butts had given to Hitch Diamond and which Hitch had discarded. He extracted the cartridges from his own useless pistol and slipped them into Skeeter's gun, for he had given that weapon to Skeeter and they were of the same calibre.

Just at that moment Tucky Sugg fought his way through the tangle of human arms and legs and sprang into the open window. Then he went screaming downward to his death as a bullet from the sheriff's pistol went with him, pocketed in the murderer's heart!

Then, as if the crack of the sheriff's pistol was her cue to enter, another woman came up-stage and stood in the blazing light of battle. She weighed four hundred and ten pounds, and resembled a balloon divided in the middle by an apron string. She was conducted by Dainty Blackum and a strange young negro man, and her name was Ginny Babe Chew.

Inside the railing, she picked up a heavy iron cuspidor, and walked over to the table where, earlier in the morning, the district attorney had sat.

"He'p me up on dis here table, honey!" she grunted, hugging the heavy cuspidor in her arms.

The district attorney lay unconscious under the table on which Ginny stood.

Ginny announced her position by a loud bellow. She raised the large iron cuspidor above her head with her fat arms, and every pound of her monstrous weight was quivering with unspeakable hate.

"Git outen my way, Hitchie!" she whooped. "Gimme room accawdin' to my fat, sonny! Let yo' mammy put somepin acrost!"

For more than a minute Sheriff Flournoy had been fingering his pistol, waiting for a chance to shoot without killing Hitch Diamond. Ginny Babe Chew's remarkable stunt gave him pause and caused him to lower his gun with astonishment.

Hitch reeled and stumbled backward. His eyes were glazing, his right arm hung broken and useless at his side, he was one bloody mass of wounds.

Dinner Gaze, his clothes torn from him until he was bare to the waist, his whole body screaming with pain from countless injuries, slowly followed Hitch in his retreat, chopping at him with weakening arms, still fighting with the broken table-leg.

"Look up, Dinner Gaze!" Ginny Babe Chew bawled. "Dis is yo' la-ast time to see de hoodoo face!"

Unconsciously responding to the command, Dinner Gaze raised his pain-shot eyes upward, and looked into the fat face, through whose rolls of flesh two green pig eyes gleamed upon him with a serpent's venom and deadly malignity.

The heavy iron cuspidor came down with a crash. It crushed the criminal's head like an eggshell. It bounced, fell on its rounded edge, and rolled slowly across the floor.

Dinner Gaze fell face downward, kicked the floor three times with the toes of his shoes, and died.

"Dar—*now!*" Ginny Babe Chew whooped.

Then she held out a fat hand to the slim young girl standing beside the table and said:

"Gimme yo' hand an' he'p me down offen dis table, honey! Dis here duck is too dang fat to be roostin' so high!"

XVIII

THE HOODOO FACE SMILES.

The panic and outflow of negroes from the trial chamber in the Tickfall courthouse started a riot-call in the town.

A clerk in the Gaitskill store across the street ran over and tolled the courthouse bell ten times. In response, every white man in Tickfall dropped his task, armed himself, and came with all possible haste to the court square.

When Tucky Sugg fell screaming from the open window, Colonel Tom Gaitskill started at the head of a band of armed men up the steps leading to the court-room. The band arrived too late to do more than constitute themselves into an ambulance corps, and render first aid to the injured.

Four physicians came panting up the steps, bumping their instrument cases against the wall as they ran, and their arrival converted the room into a hospital where the doctor became a wise and efficient judge.

Colonel Gaitskill appointed ten men as assistants and runners for the doctors, assigned to the rest of his band the task of standing on the square in heroic attitudes and guarding the courthouse, and then he cleared the room of all the curious and useless persons and closed the door.

An hour later all the wounded sat up and took notice, and some of them smiled.

Skeeter Butts arose from his place, sobbing with pain. He staggered across the blood-splashed floor toward a pitcher of water which sat on the floor by the judge's bench. Weakness overcame him, and he sank down in the witness-chair, almost fainting.

Judge Henry Haddan, whose Websterian head was considerably larger now on account of certain bruised and swollen places, and a big wad of cotton applied to them, thrust a glass of water into Skeeter's trembling hands.

"Skeeter," he asked, "how did you know that Dinner Gaze and Tucky Sugg committed that crime in Sawtown?"

"I didn't know, Marse Henry," Skeeter answered in a weak voice. "I sot down in dis chair an' I said jes' whut Ginny Babe Chew tole me to say!"

Everybody in the court-room heard Skeeter's answer. There was a general gasp of astonishment.

Judge Haddan walked wearily up to his bench and sat down. It appeared later that he was seriously hurt, and he spent many weeks in bed.

But now he was sustained by the excitement of the moment.

The district attorney dragged himself across the floor and sat down at his table near to where Dinner Gaze lay face downward, his hand still grasping the table-leg.

Ginny Babe Chew walked to the middle of the room, rested a fat hand on each fat hip, and looked up into the face of Judge Haddan.

"Yes, suh, boss," she said. "Ginny Babe Chew is to blame fer dis here noble fracas!" Then she smiled.

"How did you know, Ginny?" Judge Haddan asked, twisting his pain-shot face into an answering smile, and feeling of an extremely sore place on top of his head.

"Dude Blackum tole me!" she answered.

"Dude Blackum is dead—drowned in attempting to escape!" Judge Haddan snapped.

"Naw, suh. He warn't drowned. He's a settin' right dar by Dainty Blackum now!"

As she pointed a young, respectful, nicely dressed negro stood up, bowed to the judge, and smiled, flashing a gold front tooth.

"Naw, suh, jedge," he murmured in a deprecatory tone. "I ain't dead!"

Then they listened while Dude told his story.

After leaving his cabin with the jug, he had taken several drinks and had crawled under the porch of the commissary store to sleep because he was afraid to go back home to listen to what Dainty was sure to say about his conduct. He had been

awakened by having something thrown over his face—and this afterward proved to be the coat and vest which Tucky Sugg had taken from Hitch Diamond. Dude heard two men talking, heard them call each other by name, heard them enter the store for robbery; then Dude had seized his jug and had run to the night-watchman and made a report.

The night-watchman, running to the store, had been killed.

Dude, dodging among the lumber piles, had been captured; the only man who could clear him of suspicion had just been killed; his captors would not listen to explanations, so Dude took a desperate chance by jumping into the river, and had escaped.

What the mob thought was Dude's woolly head bobbing upon the surface of the water was really Dude's derby hat. Expecting them to shoot at his hat, Dude waited until the right time, and artfully contributed a splash and a scream, and the mob thought he had got cramps and sunk.

Chucklingly, Dude told his auditors that he was beating his hat down the river about thirty yards, swimming like Jonah inside the whale.

He returned to his cabin that night, explained everything to Dainty, mounted a mustang, and rode to Ginny Babe Chew's cabin, where she concealed him until the time of the trial. Skeeter had seen his face at the dormer window when the chicken-house burned down.

"I knowed dat Dinner Gaze an' Tucky Sugg done it, Marse Henry," Skeeter cackled. "I knowed it all de time—I had a hunch!"

"I knowed it, too," Ginny Babe Chew rumbled. "I's got a hoodoo face."

"I knowed it," Hitch Diamond growled. "Goldie told me."

"I think we had better go home," Judge Henry Haddan said, with a funny twisted smile. "My head hurts!"

"I beg your pardon, your honor," the district attorney said, rising painfully to his feet and leaning weakly against the table. "Excuse me—but haven't you forgotten something?"

Judge Haddan's aching head was not working clearly, and he did not catch Davazec's meaning at all. He thought he understood, and so he announced:

"Hitch Diamond, you are a brave negro. Your heroic fight in this court-room will be long remembered." Haddan broke off, tried to smile, and continued: "Your masterly presentation of your defense disproves, in this instance, the aphorism that a lawyer who pleads his own case has a fool for a client."

"Dat's right, boss!" Ginny Babe Chew whooped. "Little Hitchie shore is brave an' smart, ef I do say it myse'f, whut hadn't oughter. Nobody in dis country don't know it but me and Hitch—but I is Hitch's mammy! He is kin to me by bornation on de Flournoy plantation fawty years ago——"

"Aw, hush!" Judge Haddan exclaimed. "I am feeling very badly, and I am going home——"

"I beg your pardon, your honor!" the district attorney repeated in a courteous but insistent tone. "Have you not forgotten something?"

Judge Haddan rested both hands upon his aching head and thought. Then he forgot his aching head and laughed. He straightened up and spoke:

"The indictments against defendant are dismissed, and defendant discharged—the jury is excused, and court adjourned! Hitch Diamond, you are free!"

"Dar now, boss," Hitch bellowed, grinning into his honor's face. "I wus plum' shore you an' me could win dis case ef we jes' sot our minds to do it. Bless Gawd!"

THE END

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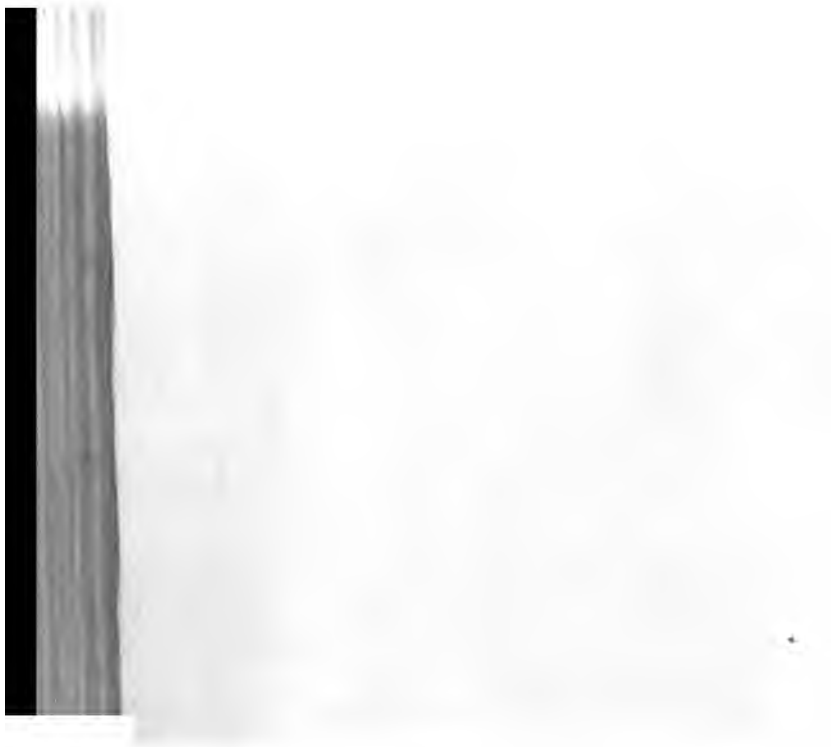

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